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DETECTIVE

STORY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 1948

25 CENTS

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BY PAUL TWITCHELL

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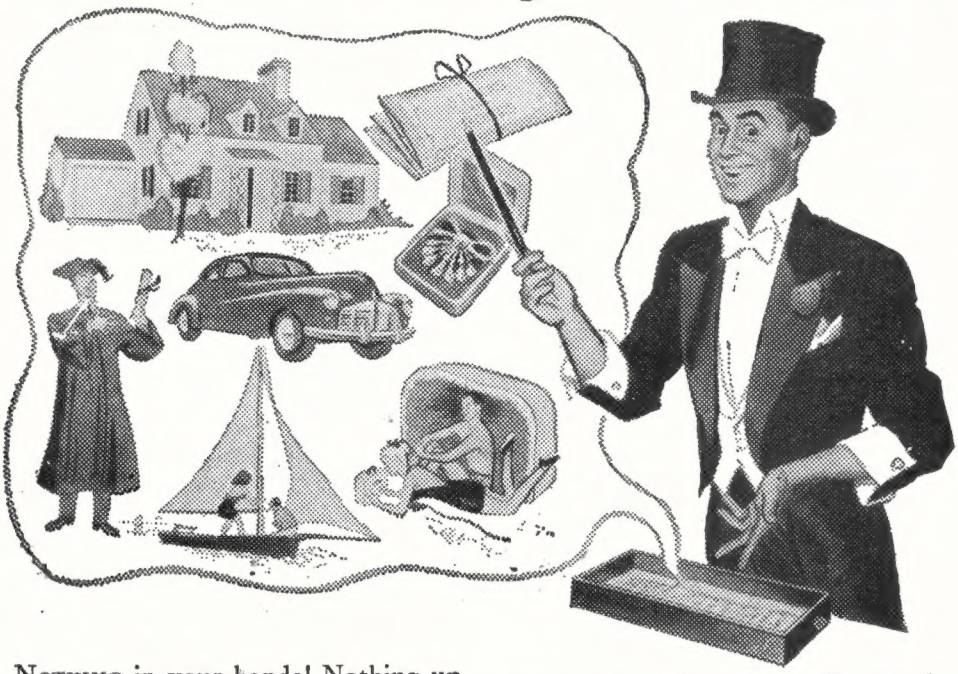

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SEPTEMBER 1948

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SHORT NOVELS

FALLEN STAR, *by William Campbell Gault* 24
WINGED HORSE MURDER, *by James Bassett* 86

NOVELETTES

DEATH RIDES A WINNER, *by Norman Anthony* 5
FOSSIL SKULL, *by Frank Richardson Pierce* 121

SHORT STORIES

THE GLASS CASTLE, *by Paul Twitchell* 53
HOMICIDE DICKS ARE SPECIALISTS,
by Edward A. Dieckmann 66
MYSTERY OF THE DEADLINE, *by R. Brownold Miller* 73
EMERALDS HAVE NO HOME, *by Frank Donovan* 113
FOOTLOOSE AND MURDER FREE, *by Hal Dean Cooper* 145
DEADLY NIGHTSHADE, *by Ronald Henderson* 149

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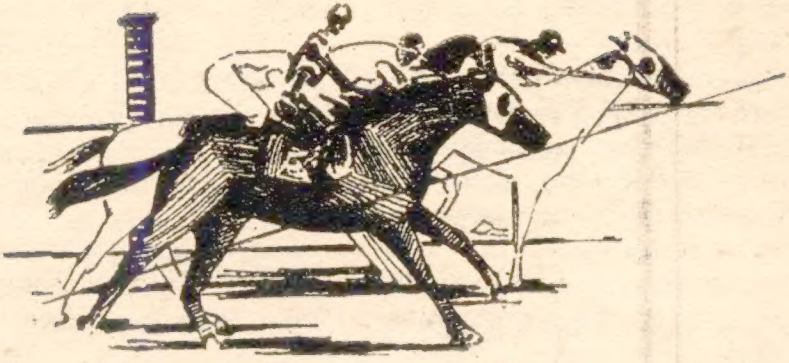
A NOVELETTE

Death



rides a winner

BY NORMAN ANTHONY

A crowd of forty thousand racing fans . . . a dead man . . . a reporter looking for an easy way to make a fast buck . . .

I.

DUTCH RYAN was standing by the rail watching the horses canter up the Widener chute toward the starting gate. He was an old pal of mine and a captain of detectives, and I wondered what he was doing at a race track.

"So this is the way you spend the taxpayers' money," I hissed in his ear.

He swung around and grinned when he saw me. "Hi, Eddie," he said. "You're just the guy I'm looking for."

"If you're looking for tips," I told him, "I'm your man. Just play the goats I don't like and you can't lose!"

"That isn't the kind of tip I'm after." He pulled me to one side, away from the crowd. "You know

this racket backwards, Eddie, and you may be able to help me."

"What's up?"

He looked around before he spoke. "The Jockey Club has called us in to try and give the Pinkertons a hand. There's some dirty work going on and they can't track it down."

"Such as what?"

"They think some of the jocks are working with a betting syndicate and throwing races. The ones they suspect ride most of the good horses and between them they control nearly every race."

"How do they figure they do it?"

"By signaling to them as they go to the post what horses to hold back."

I whistled. "Boy, that would be something. A nice little million-dollar-a-day business!"

I could see the setup; the books taking bets right up to post time and then letting the jocks know what horses to hold back! It had to be a visual signal of some kind; there weren't any phones at the track, and it had to come from somewhere outside to someone in the crowd. And that someone could signal to the jocks as they went past. All the books had to do was lay off any bets they weren't sure of and the rest was money handed to them on a silver platter!

The roar of the crowd told us the race had started, and we went back to the rail and watched the horses coming down the straight course that ran diagonally across Belmont Park. Don Medwick, on Star Gazer, was a good two lengths out in front, but Ted Stone was whipping Polyglot and closing fast. I had a bet on Medwick and it looked like I was going to have to ask my city editor for an advance and maybe lose my job. Sports writers aren't supposed to bet. Joke.

"The whip, Don!" some maniac screamed, but I guess Don couldn't hear him on account of his snoring. He never even raised his hand; just lay there on his mount's back like a dead duck. And then something happened. Polyglot faltered just as he got up to Star Gazer's rump, and Star Gazer won in spite of Medwick.

Feeling like a guy who'd just been saved from drowning, I watched the horses slow down to a jog and, as they did, Medwick slid off Star Gazer's back and hit the dirt like a sack of meal. Thanks to the late war, I've seen plenty of stiffs and you can tell they're stiffs the way they hug the ground. Dutch and I went over the rail like a couple of cross-country runners, and when we got to Medwick we could see he was deader than yesterday's losing tickets. He had on yellow silks, with a red band running down the back, but the red was blood from a bullet in his left shoulder. While the track policemen were shooing the crowd back, Dutch knelt down beside the dead jock, then he looked up at me. "Came from our side," he grunted in disgust. "Any one of forty thousand people might have done it!"

I glanced across at the packed stands and then at the straight-away

course. "Too far," I said. "Nobody's that good a shot. Must have been someone in the infield."

Dutch nodded as an ambulance came swinging around to a stop. They lifted Medwick aboard and we hopped onto the rear step. For once I'd been lucky at the track; I'd hit a murder story right on the nose! As we swept past the grandstand they were posting the odds for the next race, and the crowd had already forgotten Don. Nice people!

"Through the heart," the doc told Ryan at the hospital. "Must have killed him instantly."

Allowing for the time Medwick lay on the track and the trip to the hospital, he could have been killed most any time during the running of the race. It had been a six furlonger, and they only take about a minute and a quarter.

Ryan was doing some figuring, too. "Probably got it just before he hit the finish," he commented.

"Death rides a winner," I said, thinking of my headline.

Dutch grunted. "Whoever fired the shot certainly didn't want him to win that race."

"Maybe just the opposite. Maybe whoever shot him thought he was going to throw it."

Dutch looked at me. "Maybe you're right. And maybe it fits in with what we're after."

"Funny we didn't hear the shot," I said.

Dutch shook his head. "Not with the noise that crowd was making."

He had to do some phoning and so did I. For once my city editor was pleased. "Stick with it, Eddie," he said when I told him about the racket Dutch was investigating. "If you get that scoop you get that raise you've been yapping about!"

After we got through phoning, Dutch and I walked down to the Turfside, which was a hangout for racing folks. It was only four o'clock so there weren't many regulars. We ordered a couple of drinks and took them over to a booth. "Start talking," Dutch said as we sat down.

I took a swallow of my drink. "Well, let's see. There were six jocks in the race besides Medwick, and any one of them would have been glad to give him the business. He's the most unpopular rider in the game."

"He was shot from the left side," Dutch reminded me.

"So that would eliminate three of the jocks who were on his right. As I remember the running, Ted Stone was on Polyglot, beside him, and Lon Lindy and Ric Rocci were the other two."

"Lindy's tough, I hear."

"They don't make them any tougher. And on top of that he and Medwick were dating the same gal. A gal named Memphis Kelly."

Dutch stared at me. "Memphis? Are you kidding?"

I had to laugh at the expression on his face. For a hard-boiled dick he was as naïve as they come. "That's her own name," I told him. "She's one of those glamour models

from the deep South. She's probably been playing them both. I've seen her with Jock Thorndyke, too."

Dutch took the racing program from his pocket and opened it. "Star Gazer was a Thorndyke horse," he said thoughtfully. "Wonder where he was during the race? Those guys are usually pretty handy with guns."

"Medwick was under contract to Thorndyke and they tell me he's been giving him plenty of headaches. Wouldn't follow instructions."

"He was following instructions today from somebody," Dutch said, "somebody who wanted him to lose that race."

I nodded. "It looked like it all right. If Polyglot hadn't faltered he was a goner."

"Know any other enemies Medwick might have had?" Dutch asked.

"He had nothing else but. Mike Mitchell was one."

"Mike Mitchell?"

"He's the starter. Medwick was always playing cute tricks to beat the gate and he hated his guts."

"You don't kill a guy for that."

"It was more than that. A couple of weeks ago he and Medwick had it out behind the barns after the last race. Mitchell gave him a good shellacking."

"Didn't that satisfy him?"

"Maybe. But it didn't satisfy Medwick. The next day he hired a couple of goons to give Mitchell the works and he had to spend ten days in the hospital. Today was his first day back at the track."

"How do you know Medwick was behind it?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Just jockey house gossip."

Dutch shook his head. "Mitchell's out. Medwick was shot near the end of the race, not at the start."

"Speaking of the jockey house," I said, "it might not be a bad idea to give it a going-over."

Dutch grinned. "Who do you think I was phoning to, a vet? They're doing it right now. And they're holding the jocks until we get there."

I looked over his shoulder and saw a little guy coming into the bar. I nudged Dutch and pointed toward him. "There's one they didn't hold. Ric Rocci. He must have beat it right after the fourth race."

We watched Rocci as he strutted up to the bar and ordered a straight rye. He was a swarthy little guy with shoe-button eyes. "Invite him over for a drink," Dutch said.

I yelled at Rocci and motioned for him to join us. He hesitated for a moment, then came over and sat down next to me as if he were sitting on eggs. "Meet Ric Rocci, the famous jockey, Dutch," I introduced him. "Dutch Ryan, Ric." I winked at him. "You look like you'd just lost your best friend!"

Rocci's eyes gleamed malevolently. "You ain't kiddin', Eddie. I'm sorry it wasn't me that got the dirty, double-crossin'—"

"Were you in that race?" Dutch interrupted.

Rocci's little shoe-button eyes were suspicious. "What about it?"

Dutch smiled and beckoned to the waiter for another round. "Oh, I

just wondered. Where were you when Medwick got his?"

Rocci looked at Dutch defiantly. "I was runnin' fourth all the way. I know you now. You're a copper. An' I didn't have nothin' to do with it."

"You were in a nice spot for it, though," Dutch said softly. He suddenly leaned across the table. "They found the gun, Rocci!"

I knew Dutch was lying, but Ric didn't. He was just in the act of swallowing his drink and it spilled all over his fancy tie. He slammed his glass down and glared at Dutch. "You ain't got anything on me, copper. If you're lookin' for the guy who did it, find the guy who bribed Medwick to throw that race!"

"And who was that?"

I was watching Ric and his hands were trembling as he lit a cigarette. He hadn't meant to let that out. "I ain't talkin'," he muttered.

Ryan moved so fast I didn't even see the blow. There was a sound like a handclap and Rocci's head banged against my shoulder. He straightened up, feeling the side of his face and it was gray with fear. "Start talking," Dutch said quietly.

Rocci looked around like a rat trying to get out of a corner.

"Who was it?" Dutch repeated.

Rocci drained the last of his drink. "I'm not sure, but I think it was Louie Cristo. I saw 'em together in Louie's place last night and I knew something was up."

"How'd you know that?"

"This afternoon Don bet two grand on Polyglot!"

"How'd you know that?"

"I know the guy that placed the bet for him."

"So you think Cristo bumped him off."

Rocci nodded sullenly. "Or he hired someone to do it. Don winning that race musta cost Cristo plenty!"

"Any idea where Cristo was during the race?"

Rocci's eyes glistened again. "In the infield, on the rail about a hundred yards from the finish."

"Did you see him shoot Medwick?"

Rocci shook his head. "I only saw him when I was on the way to the post. I was too busy comin' back." There was a little sneer on his face; he was beginning to realize that Dutch didn't have much on him. "Where'd they find the gun?" he asked.

"One of the horses swallowed it," Dutch told him.

Rocci's sneer broke into a dirty smile and he got up. "Mind if I go now, copper?"

"No, but I wouldn't take any jobs at any out-of-town tracks if I were you." He watched him swagger out of the bar. "He'd think knocking off his grandmother was a good joke."

"He could have done it all right," I said.

"What, killed his grandmother?" Dutch grinned. "Know where he lives?"

"Yeah. In that big apartment house across the street from the clubhouse gate. Medwick lived there, too."

Dutch started for the phone booth. "I'm going to put a tail on him." When he came back he looked at his watch. "We'd better get over to the track. The last race is just about over."

II.

We hailed a cab and Dutch sat smoking his pipe and looking out the window. "Louie Cristo," he said, talking out loud. "He owns the Blue Owl, doesn't he?"

"Yeah, but it's just a front for his other rackets. He runs the biggest book in town and I think he's behind the Benhur stables."

Dutch turned. "And what does that mean?"

"Polyglot was a Benhur horse."

Dutch sucked on his pipe. "You mean you think he was paying Medwick to throw the race and the jock double-crossed him?"

"Something like that. In a million-dollar game there's always more than one gang. Maybe Medwick was playing one against the other."

"Know Cristo very well?"

"I knew him when he opened his first speakeasy back in '22. I've been a customer of his, off and on, ever since."

That seemed to please Dutch. "He'd clam up with us, but he might talk to you. Why don't you pay him a social call tonight? You might pick something up."

"Louie's not much of a talker, but I'll try," I said.

Dutch paid off the cab and we walked into the jockey house. A couple of cops sat there looking bored, and a half dozen jocks, dressed for the street, just sat looking mad. Lon Lindy seemed to be the maddest. Dirty red hair topped a thin, sallow face and he had a hooked nose over a sullen mouth.

Dutch went into a huddle with the cops, then he swung around. "Sorry to keep you waiting, boys. Any of you see anything queer during the race?"

None of the jocks opened their traps. They just sat there glowering.

Dutch looked at Lindy. "How about you, Lon? You were right behind Medwick."

"I wasn't on no observation car," he sneered.

"Did you hear any shot?"

Lindy seemed to be interested in a spot on the floor. "Yeah," he finally spoke, "about halfway down the chute but I thought it was an auto backfire."

"Was there any trouble of any kind during the running?"

Lindy shook his head and at that Ted Stone sat up with a jerk. "Like hell there wasn't," he snarled. He pointed an accusing finger at the other jock. "He grabbed Polyglot's saddle cloth just as I was passing Medwick!"

"You're a liar!" Lindy yelled. He made a dive for Stone and they went at it like a couple of alley cats until the cops separated them. Dutch was watching Lindy narrowly as the little guy sat down again, straightening his tie. "So *you* wanted Star Gazer to win. In that case,

there wouldn't have been much percentage in your killing Medwick."

Stone's laugh was shrill. "Except to get his gal!"

Lindy would have made another dive at him, but the cops slammed him back in his seat. Dutch didn't even notice him; he was pacing the floor and chewing irritably on his pipe. I didn't blame him. He had as much chance of getting the truth out of these little crooks as a plater in a stake race. It looked as if Stone had been honest, though. You can slow a horse up plenty by grabbing his saddle cloth. It was an old trick. There was something screwy somewhere. Lindy was jealous of Medwick, but he'd tried to help him win that race! Evidently, Dutch figured he couldn't get anywhere because he suddenly stopped his pacing and said, "All right, boys, that's all for today."

As the jocks filed out, Joe Connors came in. He was a plain-clothes man and looked it. "I got after Rocci like you said," he told Dutch, "but I was too late."

Dutch eyed him sourly. "What do you mean 'too late'?"

"Found him home in bed with his throat cut." He made the usual expressive gesture with one hand.

Dutch stared at Connors and then he stared at me. I was staring at Connors, too. "How'd you get in his apartment?" I asked him.

"I rang the bell first to see if he was home. There wasn't any answer so I walked up and found his front door open."

"Somebody followed him home from the Turfside," I told Dutch.

He nodded grimly. "I thought that little shrimp knew a lot more than he let on." He shrugged. "Well, that's that." He took a squint at his watch. "I'll go back over with Connors. Why don't you make that little call I suggested?"

I watched him climb into a police car that was parked in front of the jockey house, then I picked up a cab and went back to town. After I'd finished my story, I grabbed some dinner and went over to the Blue Owl. It was still pretty early so I sat at the bar and was drinking my second highball when a girl came in and sat near me. It was Memphis Kelly. She was a dish all right; one of those Southern taffy-blondes with brown eyes that melted you at first sight. She had on a cockeyed little black hat that must have been designed by Dahli and a plain black suit that would have invited a "new look" from any male. She paid about as much attention to me as if I'd been a Waring mixer.

"You're Memphis Kelly," I said across two bar stools.

She turned those brown headlights on me, but they weren't doing any melting. "I don't think I know you," she said.

"You do now." I told her. "I'm Eddie Burke, the sports writer.

She smiled and seemed to mean it. "I've read your column and I'm very glad to know you."

I felt a little bit dazed. Not only at her words but at that smile. It seemed to light up the whole room.

And it was such a nice honest smile. Maybe I'd figured this girl wrong. But what the devil was she doing hanging around with a bunch of saddle monkeys? Without thinking, I said it aloud. She sipped the Daiquiri she'd ordered and grinned at me over it. "Thanks for the compliment."

"That's no answer," I grunted, "and you might be interested to know that two of your boy friends are dead. Murdered. Medwick and Rocci."

Her eyelashes flickered, but her expression didn't change a particle. She took another sip of her cocktail and looked over my shoulder toward the other side of the bar. "Couldn't we sit in one of those booths?" she asked.

I ordered a couple more drinks and followed her to a corner booth. We sat down and she didn't open her pretty mouth until a waiter had brought our order and disappeared. Then she said, "I'm Stretch Kelly's daughter."

I stared at her. Stretch Kelly's kid! Probably the greatest little jock who ever threw a leg over a horse. I sat there and saw him coming down the stretch to win the 1930 Gold Cup. From nowhere. That's how he'd gotten the name Stretch. A swell little guy and as honest as they come. He'd been murdered six years before and his death was still a mystery. It was rumored to have been the work of gangsters, but they'd never been able to pin it on anybody. She knew what I was thinking.

"I'm trying to find out who killed my father," she said simply.

I began to understand a lot of things, especially her going around with jockeys. I took her hand across the table. "Lady," I said, "I owe you an apology."

The brown eyes laughed. "What for?"

I shrugged. "Oh, I've seen you around town and—well, I put the wrong two and two together."

She didn't seem to hear me. She was staring into her glass. "I think Medwick knew something about my father and I felt he was on the point of telling me."

"He knew him well?"

She nodded. "Dad taught him how to ride."

"Was he the only link with the past?"

"He and Thorndyke. Dad was under contract to ride for him."

I tried to remember back. Something clicked in my memory about a row between Kelly and Thorndyke, but I couldn't pin it down. "Did you ever get anything out of Thorndyke?"

She shook her head. "Not what I wanted."

"I get it," I said, "a wolf in jodhpurs. You picked a tough job for yourself, Miss Kelly. Whatever started you off on this?"

She opened a purse almost as big as a brief case and pulled out a wrinkled envelope and from the envelope she brought forth a piece of paper. It was faded and worn with age. As she handed it to me, I saw it was the cover of a Belmont Park

racing program, dated September 21, 1939. On the back of it there was a poem scribbled in pencil:

Fortune for a sinner
Death rides a winner!

"What does it mean?" I asked.

Her voice was husky. "About a year ago I was going over dad's things and I found it in a pocket of his riding pants. I checked the date and found it was the Fall Handicap. It was the only mount dad had that day. It was evidently an attempted bribe to lose the race."

"Did he win the race?"

Her eyes shone with pride. "He broke the track record. It still stands."

I could see someone slipping the note to Kelly as he came out of the paddock. "Stretch wouldn't pay any attention to a think like that," I said.

"He was killed that night." Memphis said in a low voice.

I lit a cigarette. I didn't have the heart to tell her that she was on a wild goose chase; that she had as much chance of picking up the trail from that note as a beagle with three legs. I looked at her. "Can I keep this note for a while?"

The brown eyes caught fire. "You mean you'll help me?"

I stuck the note in my pocket. "It's a thousand-to-one shot, but I'll try."

"Sometimes they come in," she said softly.

I looked over her shoulder and saw Jock Thorndyke standing in the doorway and for some reason felt jealous. "There's your boy friend," I grunted. "Guess he's looking for you."

I watched her float across the room to meet him and sat down again feeling very lonesome. I ordered another drink and suddenly remembered my errand. When the waiter came back I told him to tell Louie Eddie Burke would like to see him. In a few minutes Louie was standing by my table. He was a pasty-faced little toad with an evil smirk under a small black mustache. "Hello, Eddie," he said.

He sat down opposite me and kept the smile going. "What goes?"

"What goes with you?" I asked. "How's business?"

He shrugged. "Not so good. I dropped a bundle at the track today."

I grinned. "So I heard. Didn't drop anything else, did you?"

He let that one ride, but I saw a muscle twitch in his cheek. "You know, Eddie," he said after a moment, "we've been friends for a long time. Let's stay friends."

"Meaning what?"

"You mind your business and I'll mind mine."

I finished my drink and got up. "You know where you can go with that advice, Louie."

As I walked out. I saw Memphis and Thorndyke sitting at the bar and felt even madder. I started walking down the street and didn't notice the two guys following me. There's an alley about half-way down the block and as I passed it I felt something grab my arm and the

next thing I knew I was in the alley. I took a look at my playmates. One was well over six feet with a flat nose and a scar running the length of a blue cheek; the other guy was short and stocky and built like an ape. That was about all I had time to see before I got it in the neck and I thought a building had fallen on me. It bent me over and I got one on the chin and my brain exploded. I could feel my head shooting up in the air and a heavy boot caught me in the groin. I bent over again, holding my head with both hands while I vomited, and they turned me into a two-way punching bag. I counted the blows—one,two, three, four, five, six, seven—then I stopped counting.

I didn't feel anything when I hit the pavement, but I must have been still conscious because I crawled on my hands and knees as far as the sidewalk and fell down again on my face. My head hitting the stone must have waked me up a little and after a couple of years I got on my feet. Some colored lights were doing a pinwheel down at the corner and I staggered toward them and finally caught up with them.

An elderly couple were sitting at the soda counter in the drugstore. They stared at me and so did the soda jerker as I fell into the phone booth but none of them said a word. I managed to get a nickel out of my pocket and dialed Dutch's number, but there wasn't any answer. The soda trio were still staring as I left the store. I hailed a cab and the driver stared, too. "What hospital, buddy?" he asked.

I gave him my home address and fell into the cab.

III.

The telephone woke me the next morning. I felt like a laundered shirt with too much starch in it. I reached for the phone and let out a yelp. My ribs had too much starch in them, too.

It was Dutch. "Thought you'd like to go to the track for a change," he said. "I'll stop by for you in an hour."

I stayed in a hot shower for half that time and after I got dressed I went down to the barber shop. Bennie fixed me up the best he could and when I saw myself in the mirror I didn't look much worse than a model T Ford that's been in an accident.

"Well, well," Dutch said as I climbed in his car, "what hit you?"

"Louie Cristo," I hissed through a couple of missing teeth. "Got any more social calls for me to make?" I told him what had happened and he looked worried.

"You're monkeying with a buzzsaw, Eddie. Maybe you'd better lay off. You'll get more than a going-over next time."

I tried to grin and it hurt. "Yeah. I'm real interested now!"

Dutch spent a half hour getting his pipe lit. "It looks like Rocci knocked Medwick off," he said finally.

"Yeah?"

"We found the gun in Rocci's trunk with his fingerprints on it. One .32 slug fired, the same as finished Medwick."

"Then who killed Rocci?"

Dutch grinned. "Who killed Cock Robin? Maybe they were both double-crossing the same mob. We know Medwick was double-crossing Thorndyke. It could have been him. We found out he was on the rail near the finish yesterday."

His mention of Thorndyke made me think of Memphis. I told Dutch about her. He almost bit his pipe stem in two. "Well, I'm damned! I worked on that case!"

"You're still working on it," I said. I showed him the note. "Kelly got that the afternoon of the day he was killed."

Dutch studied it while I told him the story. When I'd finished, he shook his head. "And she expects to find the murderer of her father with *this?*"

I winked at him. "No, I do."

Dutch shook his head again. "You haven't a prayer, Eddie. Your only chance of picking up the trail is to show that note around in the hopes that someone might recognize the handwriting. And the minute you begin showing it around, it will become common gossip and put the murderer, if he's still alive, on his guard."

"How was Kelly killed?" I asked him.

"Shot in a barroom. He was sitting with a girl, plugged from behind, no witnesses to the shooting." Dutch stared out the window. "Funny thing" he mused, "the gun had a silencer on it. So did Rocci's."

I was eight jumps ahead of him. "The same guy might be behind this!"

"It's an angle," Dutch admitted. "That gun in Rocci's place might have been planted."

"But you said Rocci's fingerprints were on it."

"They were. But it would have been easy to get his prints on the butt after he was dead. Just squeeze his hand around it." Dutch took another half hour lighting his pipe. "By the way," he said, "your friend Mike Mitchell was in to see me this morning. One of the Pinkertons saw a guy on the rail yesterday signaling to the jocks on the way to the post."

"How'd he signal?"

"He held three fingers down. The No. 3 horse was the favorite and it ran out of the money."

"Did he say who the jock was?"

Dutch nodded grimly. "Yeah, Rocci. They questioned the guy on the rail for four hours, but he wouldn't admit a thing. Claimed his fingers just happened to be that way."

"They're wasting their time," I said. "The signal to catch is the one that comes from *outside* the track. They wouldn't dare use lights, or anything like that; it's got to be something very subtle." I patted the binoculars hanging from my neck. "I'm going to do a little Boy Scouting this afternoon!"

We were turning into the club-

house gate, Dutch grinned. "You mean to say you're not even going to lay a bet?"

I shook my head determinedly. "Today I'm playing a thousand-to-one shot!"

Dutch and I had a drink at the bar, then I left him and climbed the four flights of stairs to the top of the stands. From there you can see the whole countryside. The race course looked like a bright green carpet dropped into the middle of a wasteland; the Long Island trains were toy ones. I swept the glasses back and forth slowly and rows of little houses, all exactly alike, jumped at me. There seemed to be hundreds of them. The sun felt nice and warm on my sore back but my heart was chilly. A needle in the haystack was a Chrysler Building compared to what I was looking for!

The horses came out on the track for the first race and I glued my eyes to the surrounding countryside for any signs of movement, but the only things moving were automobiles and trucks. I followed the jocks on their horses as they paraded to the post, but they seemed to be minding their own business. I could see Mike Mitchell standing on his platform by the starting gate, leaning nonchalantly against the railing and watching the horses go into their stalls. I could even see his hand clench as he pressed the button that opened the gates and the crowd let out a roar. I kept my glasses on Lindy and Stone all the way around the track. Both of them seemed to be holding their mounts back, but it was difficult to prove a thing like that.

I didn't pay any attention to who won and went back to studying the Long Island suburbs. It was a dreary pastime. By the time the sixth race was coming up my arms ached from holding the binoculars and my eyes had spots dancing in front of them. As the horses came on the track, I glanced at the tote board. Lon Lindy's entry was even money and Ted Stone's was two-to-one. Over a hundred thousand dollars was riding on them to win and there was probably fifty times that much going through the books in town. What a racket!

I swept the glasses back and forth across the countryside and was just about to give up in disgust when something glinted in the sunlight. I brought the glasses back with a jerk and focused them on the back of one of the little houses. It had a small boxlike back yard, just like all the others, and a big back window which was probably the dining room. The white Venetian blind in the window was down and I could see the narrow slats in it open and close. That was what had glinted in the sun. Someone behind that blind was pulling the cords that opened and closed the slats and he was doing it in Morse code! My three years in the Signal Corps began to pay dividends!

"One, three," flashed the message.

One and three were Lindy's and Stone's horses! That meant hold them back! I lowered my glasses to

the rail, but couldn't see anything but backs. Someone in that mob down there, someone with glasses, was getting the signal and transmitting it to the two jocks! I waited until the race was over and, sure enough, Nos. 1 and 3 were out of the money. Going downstairs I was breathing harder than when I climbed up. What a story! And then I stopped in my tracks. I had a story all right, but breaking it would throw a monkey wrench in the solving of the murders. If Cristo and his henchmen were sent to jail, and the jocks thrown off the track, we'd have nothing left to work on!

I found Dutch at the bar and told him what had happened. I also told him what would happen if we broke the story.

He nodded grimly. "What you saw is only the beginning anyway. We've got to catch them in the act. Which house is it?"

I took him up to the mezzanine and let him take my glasses while I pointed it out. It was the eighth house from the right end.

He handed the glasses back and grinned. "Nice work, Eddie. You've got yourself a whale of a story. We'll have the house watched and tap the telephone so we can find out where it's coming from in New York. Looks like it's Cristo all right."

Dutch had plenty to do so after he left I went back to the bar and there was Memphis and I found my heart was doing flip flops when I saw her. We had a couple of drinks and I said if she liked I'd drive her back to town. We grabbed a cab and all of a sudden I was having a hard time making conversation. I felt like a high-school kid on his first date.

When I did say something I put my foot right in my mouth. "Did you compare the handwriting on that note to Thorndyke's?"

"Long ago. It isn't the same."

"You're not thinking of marrying that lunkhead, are you?"

She didn't say anything for a minute and when she spoke her voice had a curious hardness. "I would if it were necessary. I think he knows something."

"I know something, too," I blurted out. "I think I'm in love with you!"

She looked at me and the next thing I knew she was in my arms. We sat that way until we hit the Midtown tunnel and when we came out I let her go. "I've an idea," I said. "It may not work but it's worth trying."

I told her what it was and she agreed to meet me at the Blue Owl at nine o'clock. I dropped her at her apartment, went to the paper and did my story, then I went to a Turkish bath to try to remove the aches. When I got to the Blue Owl it was exactly nine and there was Memphis sitting in a booth waiting for me. What a woman!

It wasn't long before Louie came by and his little pig eyes opened wide when he saw my face. "Why, Eddie, what happened to you?" he asked with the sweet innocence of a choir boy.

"I walked into a door," I told him. I motioned toward Memphis. "Meet Miss Kelly, she wants to try her luck at roulette. Will you fix it up for her?"

He smiled obligingly and tore off a corner of the menu and scribbled a note on it, then he handed it to her. "I wish you luck," he said and his eyes slanted toward me. "Better than Eddie, anyway!"

After he'd left I grabbed the note from her and compared it to her father's. It wasn't the same handwriting.

"We'd better go upstairs," I said gloomily, "or Louie might be suspicious."

We finished our drinks and went up a soft carpeted stairway to a soft carpeted hall. There was a very solid-looking door at one end and when I knocked a ratfaced gent in evening clothes opened it and bowed politely. Memphis handed him Cristo's note and he waved us inside. It was still early and the gambling room wasn't very crowded, but there seemed to be quite a gathering around the center table. We walked toward it and, as we did so, Memphis nudged me and pointed. I followed her finger and saw a woman around thirty-five or forty sitting at the end opposite the croupier. She had the reddest hair I've ever seen, heavy green earrings and a snaky green evening gown. Even from that distance she emanated sex.

"Not bad," I said in Memphis' ear, "but not my type. What about her?"

Memphis had a puzzled frown on her face. "I know her from somewhere and yet I can't place her." She suddenly gripped my arm. "I've got it! She was one of dad's big romances!"

I remembered some of the stories I'd heard about Stretch Kelly. He'd been quite a boy with the girls. "He had good taste," I admitted.

"I can't even remember her name," Memphis whispered. "All I seem to remember is that she was married and got dad in hot water of some kind."

"She looks like she could get an Eskimo in hot water," I agreed.

We hung around for a while and then I suggested going home. I was beginning to realize that it had been a long day and that I'd been in a fight. I put Memphis in a cab and leaned forward to kiss her good night but she grinned and slammed the door in my face. "You're too tired!"

IV.

Dutch picked me up at eleven the next morning and he had a fine grouch on. He wasn't getting anywhere and the jocks under suspicion were sitting tighter than clams on a beach.

"How about the house opposite the track?" I asked him.

"A woman with a little kid lives there. No attempt to cover up at all. Either she does the signaling or somebody comes around at noon

and takes over. We've tapped the wires and a couple of men are watching the house. This afternoon the entire Pinkerton force will be watching the rail and a half dozen in the grandstand on the lookout for signals. We ought to have it all cleaned up by tomorrow." Dutch stopped for breath

"But not the murder," I reminded him.

Dutch's face was obstinate. "It can't be helped, Eddie. We can't let Cristo, or whoever it is, go on stealing the taxpayers' money while we hunt for a killer!"

I saw he was right. "Where are we going now?"

"Medwick's place. I want to give it another going-over."

Medwick's apartment wouldn't have taken a prize in a home decorating contest, but it did boast a grand piano and what I saw on it stopped me in my tracks. It was a cabinet photograph of the luscious redhead I'd seen playing roulette in the Blue Owl. Scrawled across the bottom of the picture I read, "To Don—Louise."

Dutch was looking over my shoulder. "You know her?"

"Cherchez la femme!" I said. "She was one of Stretch Kelly's girls!"

"Cherchez la phooey!" Dutch grunted.

"You dumb dick!" I yelled. "Don't you get it? She might have been the cause for all *three* murders!"

Dutch grinned at my excitement. "Her photo wasn't in Rocci's place!" Going to a desk in the corner he pulled all the letters out of the pigeon holes and tossed some of them to me. "Help me go through these," he said. "We might pick up something."

I sat down in a chair by the window and glanced through Medwick's mail. It was mostly fan letters, some kicks from cranks on account of races he'd lost, and a lot of unpaid bills. I concentrated on the love letters and my eyes suddenly popped at one of them. I dug in my pocket and pulled out Memphis' note and compared it to the other one. The handwriting was identical!

The letter wasn't signed unfortunately; it was just a note and said: "This is my last warning. Keep away from Louise."

I let out a yelp and showed the two notes to Dutch. He didn't seem to be excited at all. "Where's the envelope?" he wanted to know.

I'd been looking at it while he read the letter. "It's postmarked New York. No return address."

Dutch grunted. "That's a big help! So you're right where you started with the other one!"

I had to admit he was right and cursed silently. While Dutch was going through the mail I got up and looked at the pictures on the walls. Most of them were of Medwick, sitting on different nags with flowered horseshoes around his neck, and some were action shots. I noticed Medwick didn't sit his horse the way most jocks did. Most jocks

rode acey-deucey which is leaning over to one side so they can whip better, but Medwick rode erect, right in the middle of the saddle the way the English jocks ride.

The other pictures were mostly babes with loving messages scribbled on them. Sandwiched in among these pin-ups was a framed poem titled "Dead Game." It was all about an heroic jock who'd had a heart attack halfway through a race, but had stuck in his saddle until he won. It was pretty corny. I took a squint at the signatures of the poet at the bottom and started to yell for Dutch. Then I stopped; he'd only think I was nuts. But my brain was buzzing like a horsefly around a horse.

After Dutch got through we drove over to the track. I was glad we were early because there were two goats I wanted to bet on. They were Memphis Belle and Irish Eddie! Memphis Belle won the first race so I stuck the roll on Irish Eddie and collected four hundred bucks for the five I'd put up! I was beginning to think it was my day when I saw Dutch coming up to the bar and he had a face that would sour milk. "You and your Venetian blind!" he grunted. "It hasn't moved an inch!"

Lindy and Stone had had mounts in the first and second races and they'd both been out of the money. There *must* have been a signal.

"All they saw," said Dutch. "was a woman beating a carpet."

I stared at him. "Well, what more do you want? They've changed their systems of signaling, that's all! It's just as easy to beat out the Morse code on a carpet!"

Dutch nodded and we went up on top and sat down next to one of his watchers. When the horses came out for the third race I trained my glasses on the little house. The carpet was gone now and the woman was hanging clothes on a line. They were hung in groups with open spaces between them. Two pairs of panties, a space, three bath towels, another space, and four dish cloths. Two, three and four! I gave Dutch my glasses and explained the code. When the horses came down to the finish 2, 3 and 4 were out of the money!

Dutch grinned happily for the first time that day. "We'll raid the house just before the seventh race." We went downstairs and he said, "I'll meet you at the Blue Owl at ten tonight. I think I'll have a date there!"

After that I lost interest in the race. I left the track and walked down to the Turfside. I telephoned Memphis and made a date for dinner, then I sat down at the end of the bar and ordered a drink. The bar was empty and the barkeep was looking for conversation. "Medwick come in here often?" I opened it up.

He was a playful guy. "Not for the last couple of days!"

"Suppose he usually had a gal with him."

"Yeah. He was a great one for the dames."

"Ever notice a redhead with him? A very sexy-looking babe?"

He jerked his bald head up and down. "Sure. She used to come in with him a lot until—"

"Until what?"

He grinned. "Until one night her husband came in and caught them together. He was going to kill Medwick."

"What did he look like?"

The bartender described him and that ended the conversation as far as I was concerned. I thanked him and paid for my drink and beat it. When I got back to the office, I wrote my story and after I got through I sealed it in an envelope and turned it over to a pal of mine with instructions not to turn it in until he got a phone message from me.

Then I met Memphis and she knew right away something was up. I guess she knew it from the gleam in my eye. Just to play it safe I let her think it was the parlay I'd hit and ordered champagne.

"How'd you like to marry a rich sports writer?" I asked her.

She got it right away. Her brown eyes lit up like a neon sign and her voice was husky. "You mean the ten-thousand-dollar reward for solving the murder?"

"Maybe," I said. "I'm not absolutely sure yet."

She smiled softly and took my hand. "I had a feeling you'd do it. Sometimes those thousand-to-one shots come in."

V.

We landed at the Blue Owl about ten, feeling pretty good, and sat in a booth near the door. I wanted to have a ringside seat when Louie got the business. He came over and greeted us and I could tell from his satisfied smirk that he didn't know anything was popping. He even bought us a drink and told us to enjoy ourselves. I was pretty sure we would and lifted my drink to him. Over his shoulder I saw a man standing in the doorway. He was gazing around the room as if he was looking for somebody. It was Mike Mitchell. I yelled at him and he came over.

"You're just the guy I wanted to see," I told him with a grin. "We've cracked the racket!"

He seemed to be delighted and shook my hand heartily. "Swell," he exclaimed. "If it hadn't been cracked soon it might have killed racing." His eyes flicked toward Memphis, then came back to me. "How'd you do it?" he asked.

I winked at him. "I'll leave that to Dutch Ryan to explain. He'll be here in a little while."

Behind him I could see Louie, his fat face the color of a glass of milk. He just stood there, rigid, trying to figure out what had happened. I smiled at Mitchell and motioned toward Memphis. "Meet Memphis Kelly, the famous model, Mike, but, beware, she's an autograph hound!"

Mitchell bowed and sat down and I said, "Memphis this is Mike Mitchell, the famous starter. If

you're a good girl he may give you his autograph." I turned a menu over on its blank side and gave Memphis the eye.

She rose to the occasion like the smart gal she was. "Oh, would you, Mr. Mitchell?"

Mitchell shrugged modestly and took a fountain pen from his pocket and wrote, "To Memphis Kelly from Michael Mitchell." "I'm afraid I'm not as famous as Eddie makes out," he said.

I took a look at what he'd written and recognized it as the same handwriting in the note Memphis had had. "Mike," I said softly, "this is Stretch Kelly's daughter."

My eyes were glued on his face and I could see the blood run out of it and the muscles in his jaw twitched. "Memphis," I went on, "this is the man who murdered your father."

Mitchell's expression seemed to freeze into a curious grimace, then the blood coursed back into his face, turning it into a sort of dirty purple. He stared at me with a thin smile. "You have an odd sense of humor, Eddie!"

"Very odd," I agreed. "You killed Medwick and Rocci, too!"

His laughter sounded like the cracking of ice, and his eyes dropped to my glass of champagne. "I'm afraid you're drunk, Burke."

"Cold sober," I said. "Rocci saw you shoot Medwick; that's why you had to kill him. And after you killed him, you put his hand around your gun butt so they'd think *he* murdered Medwick!"

I knew I had him. His eyes seemed to lose control and darted back and forth like a cornered animal. They finally focused on me and they were burning coals of murder. I could see Louie behind him and with Louie were half a dozen waiters. At Mike's first move they were on him and he didn't have a chance. Louie dusted off his hands and stared down at me. "I was listening, Eddie," he whispered. He looked at Mitchell. "So he killed Medwick?"

I nodded.

Louie's pasty face was a study. "So Don wasn't double-crossing me after all!"

"He was dead long before he hit the finish," I told him.

Louie's twisted smile was abject. "And I thought you were nosing into my business!" He gestured apologetically. "What do you want done with the punk?"

I had to laugh. And I was laughing because Dutch was coming in with a dozen cops at his heels. Through the door I could see another dozen running up the carpeted stairway. "Don't do anything, Louie," I said. "It won't be necessary!"

By that time Dutch had his hand on Cristo's shoulder. "You're under arrest, Cristo." Dutch winked at me. "We caught 'em cold, Eddie. Rounded up the whole gang. Lindy and Stone have confessed, not to mention four other jocks."

"Nice work," I said. "While you're about it you can arrest a murderer. Mr. Mike Mitchell, who killed both Medwick and Rocci—and Stretch Kelly!"

After the excitement was over, Dutch came back and joined us, and I introduced him to Memphis.

"I knew your dad well," he said. "A great little guy." He stared at me across the table. "Eddie, how the hell did you do it?"

"Dumb Irish luck," I admitted. "When I was looking at those photos in Medwick's place, I noticed that he rode differently than the other jocks, straight in the saddle. On a straightaway he could have taken a nap and not fallen off. I put two and two together and got six furlongs."

"You mean he was killed at the *start* of the race?"

I nodded. "Mitchell shot him right at the start. He may not have been killed instantly. Anyway, his staying on wasn't so remarkable on a straight course."

"How'd you figure Mitchell?" Dutch asked.

I grinned. "Another piece of luck. Among the photos at Medwick's was a framed poem signed by Michael Mitchell. Remember, the warning note was in rhyme, too?"

Dutch scowled. "Why didn't you tell me about it at the time?"

I laughed. "I knew you'd think I was nuts. Anyway, it wasn't until after I left you that I discovered the redhead in the photograph was Mitchell's wife."

"I'm damned!" Dutch muttered. "And how'd you find that out?"

"At the Turfside. The bartender told me how she used to come in there with Medwick until one night her husband caught them there and threatened to kill him. When he described the husband I realized it was Mitchell. Mitchell was driven to killing by jealousy. His wife was an inveterate gambler and two-timer. The combination spelled murder sooner or later."

"Why did he kill Rocci?"

"Rocci probably saw him shoot Medwick as the horses left the gate and was trying a little blackmail."

Dutch started to say something, then hesitated. He wanted to ask about Stretch Kelly, but he didn't have the heart to do it in front of Memphis. She got it.

"I'd like to know about dad, too," she said in a low voice.

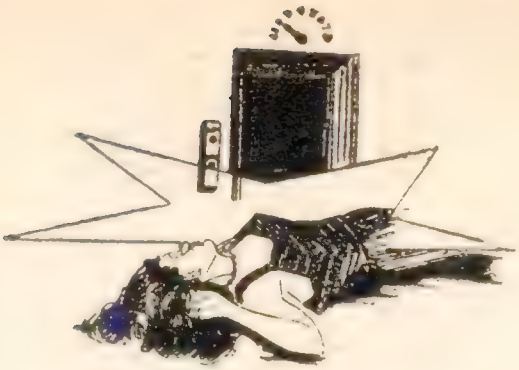
"Practically the same setup," I told her, "but I don't think the note had anything to do with throwing a race. I think Mitchell was a bit cracked even that long ago and the note was just a warning to keep away from his wife. In Mitchell's book, Stretch was a rich sinner and if he won his wife away from him he'd be killed."

The three of us sat there saying nothing for a while, thinking about Stretch Kelly. Finally, Dutch got up and grinned down at me.

"You ought to go in for soft-shoeing, Eddie."

I grinned back and put my arm around Memphis. "I'm thinking about it. Carpet slippers!"

THE END.



Fallen star

BY WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

She was dead, a fallen star, and there were so many men who could have murdered her, who probably wanted to murder her.

I.

IT would have been her biggest year, I think. Delahunt had written a new comedy tailored for her particular and exceptional talents, and Delahunt knew how to fashion a box office smash. He'd had enough of them. Besides that, he was in love with her; he'd put all his moxie into this one.

It was Delahunt who came to see me.

He was a thin, haggard man in his thirties, with dark hair and flashing dark eyes, carelessly dressed in very expensive clothes. He looked more like a poet than a playwright; he looked, in fact, like a poet who'd eventually realized how poor were the monetary rewards of *that* trade.

He sat in my shabby office this bitter February afternoon telling me all about it. How she'd worked, slaved and studied. How careful she'd been with her money because she knew enough about poverty to fear it. How cold her intimates thought her, but how wrong they were.

The haunted eyes still held the memory of her warmth when he said

this. He seemed to shake himself then, and he fumbled in his jacket pocket for a pack of cigarettes. He offered me one, which I refused, and lighted one for himself.

He said, "I want you to work on this mess, Mr. Brown. I want you to find out who killed Ellen Charles."

"I can try," I told him. "The police are trying twenty-four hours a day on that case, though, and they have the men and the facilities to produce better results than I can hope for."

He nodded irritably. "I know, I know, but I want *you* to work on it. I've told you considerably more than I've told the police. I've told you considerably more than I ever intended to tell anybody. You've got that much of a start on them. And you were very highly recommended." He fumbled through some more pockets and found a check book. "I believe a retainer is customary in work of this sort."

I said that it was, and told him my rates.

He wrote out the check, handed it to me, and rose. He was quite a bit taller than I am, but I'm not tall. He considered me quietly a moment, and said, "Good hunting, Mr. Brown. Keep in touch with me, won't you?"

I promised I would, and walked with him to the door.

When he'd left, I went to the window. It was a quiet, cold day, with a film of new snow covering the ice-ridged street below. I saw Rolf Delahunt cross the sidewalk and climb into a Packard club at the curb. Despite the bitterness of the weather, he wore neither topcoat nor overcoat.

The Packard moved off, and the street was now deserted except for a beer truck up in front of Mike's.

Delahunt had told me some things I hadn't read in the papers about the death of Ellen Charles. It was his belief that she'd been killed by someone within the immediate circle of their friends. She'd been killed in the self-operated elevator of his apartment house with a .32 calibre weapon.

It was an elevator that stopped either way at any floor where there was a summons. According to the police reconstruction, Miss Charles had entered the elevator on the ground floor for the trip to Rolf Delahunt's top-floor studio apartment. Someone had stopped the cage on the second floor, with the button, stepped in to shoot Miss Charles, and then stepped out again, though sending the cage to the top. Rolf Delahunt had been waiting up there; he had opened the elevator door to find Miss Charles dead.

Only one shot had been fired, at close range. It had entered through the soft flesh of her chin, through the mouth and palate, into her brain.

The smell of cordite still lingered in the cage when the police arrived, and there was a hint of it in the second-floor hallway.

Nobody had seen the killer, though many had heard the shot. Nobody on the second floor had seemed to be in a hurry to get to their front doors, which was understandable.

The killer may have banked on that hesitation. The killer may also have been in East Overshoe, Indiana, by now. Though Rolf Delahunt didn't think so.

I thought of all the times I'd watched Ellen Charles spin her magic, all the nights I'd felt the pull of her way up in the balcony. Remembering these things, I forgot the bleak street below and the chill of the office. I thought of the stories Delahunt had told me, and wondered how many of them were true.

I was still standing there when my phone rang.

It was the chief. "He hire you?"

"I don't know what you mean, chief," I replied.

"Delahunt," the chief said. "We've got a man on him, of course, and I just learned that he's been to see you."

"He left a few minutes ago," I answered. "You work fast down there. Yes, he hired me." I paused. "That . . . all right?"

He chuckled. "It's all right with me, Galvy. As a matter-of-fact, he asked me for the name of a competent private detective, and I—" He coughed. "Well, off the record, you know, I suggested you."

"Thank you, sir," I said.

"Do you want to know why?" he asked.

"Why?"

"Because I knew you'd co-operate. I knew you, above all the others, would work with us all the way. That's true, isn't it, Galvy?"

"That's the gospel, chief," I agreed. "That even includes Detjen."

A silence for the moment on the wire and then his voice saying quietly, "Yes, Galvy, that even includes Detjen."

He hung up.

Detjen was the boss of homicide and a man at whose funeral I would shed no tears. Nor he at mine. A natural antipathy we share for each other, an antipathy that grows with the years. I hadn't seen him since the last time we'd tangled, but the word was he was out to get me. But he'd always been out to get me.

I went back to the window; the street below looked bleaker, if anything. I went over to my file and got out the rye. I had a good, stiff hooker of that with a little tap water.

Then I read the notes I'd made while Delahunt was talking. I checked the phone book for the addresses of all the names he'd given me, and found most of them.

There was a possibility none of them would mean anything, a very strong possibility, but he was paying me to find out. Her agent's name was there, and her maid's. Her former husband's name was there, and the names of two men of the many who'd loved her, two men more persistent than the others.

If I were to think like the department was probably thinking, the name of Rolf Delahunt would join the others on the list. But he was paying me to think another way.

It wasn't time for supper, but I was hungry. I put on my new black fleece overcoat and went over to Mike's.

Mike was reading the sports

pages and looking disgusted. "It beats me," he said. "It sure beats me."

"What beats you?" I asked politely.

"Them writers," he said. "Experts they're supposed to be, ain't they? They're getting paid to know what they're talking about, ain't they?"

"An American fallacy," I told him.

"Which means in English?"

"A mistaken belief. Writers are paid for putting words together, Mike. If they do that, and do it well, they make money. But you can't expect any more than that from them."

Mike regarded me gravely. "You serious? How about Dan Parker?"

"He's the exception," I said. "What's to eat?"

He was still looking thoughtful. "I got some stew. Pretty good, too. I got some hamburger I could fry up."

"I'll take the stew," I told him. "With some rye rolls and coffee."

It was good stew, and the coffee was fresh. The rolls were from yesterday though, a fact which I mentioned.

"I'm lucky to get 'em," he said absently. "I don't buy enough to make it worth the driver's trouble." He paused. "You think them writers could be wrong about the Dodgers' chances?"

"Practically anybody could be wrong about the Dodgers," I told him. "Mike, it's February. Why don't you worry about something in season?"

"I do," he said. "I worry about are they going to find the guy that killed Ellen Charles. I worry about that a lot." His eyes were dreamy. "What a lovely, lovely doll. I wonder how come she never made Hollywood."

To Mike, Hollywood was the zenith. I looked at him suspiciously, wondering if he'd seen Rolf Delahunt leave my office. I doubted, though, that Mike would recognize him.

"I guess they're working on it night and day," I murmured.

"I suppose," he said. "Homicide, though—" He shook his head. "That Detjen still down there?"

I nodded, and asked for another cup of coffee.

Mike went back to his paper, and there was silence in the place. Outside, a truck rumbled by, the bark of its exhaust sharp on the still, cold air.

Ellen Charles. Dark hair, large dark eyes, high breasted, and those long, slim legs. The soft, stirring quality of her voice, the grace of her every gesture. She was dead, she was a fallen star. I tried to forget the stories Delahunt had told me, the cynical account of her climb, and the people she'd used on the way up. It was an old story, trite and true, but I didn't want to believe it about Ellen Charles.

I wasn't gullible enough to believe her publicity, but I wanted to.

Mike was reading the front page now. He shook his head again. "'The police are overlooking no clue,'" he read, "'however small, in their re-

lentless efforts to solved the brutal slaying—'" He went down to pour himself a cup of coffee. "Five will get you ten," he said, "they don't solve nothing."

I paid him for the meal and went out. It was only a little after four; Ellen's agent might still be in his office.

Mike Adams' office was over on Fortieth, a modest, second-floor suite of rooms with no advertising on the door. Done mostly in brown, with burgundy drapes and burgundy carpeting, wall to wall. In the large outer room, his secretary asked my name and business, then disappeared through the door behind her desk, to the right.

When she came out again, she said, "Mr. Adams will see you now, Mr. Brown." She held the door open for me.

Mike Adams was a well-built man of less than medium height, with gray-streaked black hair and sharp blue eyes. He was sitting at his desk, when I entered, looking down at his hands.

He rose and studied me as I walked to the chair on the opposite side of his desk. He offered me a cigar from a humidor, which I refused.

"I'm checking Miss Charles' background," I said. "I have the full cooperation of the police department."

He looked down at his hands again. "Her background? I'm not sure I understand, Mr. Brown."

I said, "I've heard she was rather unscrupulous. Or perhaps that isn't the word. I mean—"

"Unscrupulous will do," he said dryly. "Well, she was. But if you're going to investigate her enemies, you've started too late, Mr. Brown. It would take more years than you have left."

"I'm sorry to hear that," I said, "because I thought she was . . . she was a great artist."

"She was. I handled her, and I knew her better than most. I handled her when she was in burlesque, and I went right up with her. I wasn't only her agent, I was her business manager. And she knew where she was going all the time. She had more talent than anybody can name. But she didn't have any more ethics than a squirrel."

"How about her former husband?"

"He had close to three million dollars when she married him. He lost it in 1941. That was the year she divorced him, after he'd lost it."

"He's still around, isn't he?"

"He's still around. He's selling bonds for Deever & McKinnon, when he's sober."

"She must have left quite an estate. She didn't have any children, did she?"

He looked at me for some seconds. "No, she didn't have any children. And, by a strange coincidence, her estate goes to me."

"I see," I said, and met his steady gaze. "She must have been very grateful. You must have been a big help to her."

"She was grateful, I suppose," he said quietly. "But she didn't need any help."

"The police have questioned you?"

"Thoroughly. And not as a witness. They checked my alibi for that night, too, Mr. Brown." He sighed. "If you're really intent on digging into this, my bet would be Harry Kelvic, her former husband. When he's carrying a load—" Adams shook his head. "There isn't anything he wouldn't do when he's like that."

"Thanks," I said, and rose.

He nodded, without getting up. He seemed interested in his hands again. When I was at the door, he said, "Be very careful with that Kelvic if he's drunk. He's the dangerous kind of drunk."

I thanked him again and left.

From a drugstore nearby, I phoned the firm of Deever & McKinnon and asked for Harry Kelvic.

The nasal voice of the firm's switchboard operator informed me that Mr. Kelvic was no longer with the organization.

"Could you tell me where I might reach him?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but we do not have that information."

"You must have his address on file if he worked there," I protested. "At least, his address at that time."

"I'm sorry, sir," she said. "We do not have that information."

If he was a lush, the firm was probably peeved, and that's why I was getting the formula run-around. I didn't argue with her further, but phoned Rolf Delahunt's office, a downtown room where he did most of his work.

Mr. Delahunt, his secretary informed me, would be back in about ten minutes; he had just stepped out. She would be glad to have him phone me.

I realized it was only a few blocks from here; I told her I'd be over.

I left the Hisso where she was, and walked over. It was on Thirty-eighth, another second-floor suite in a three-story building. Decorated even more plainly than Mike Adams' had been; this one in gray.

There was a girl bending over the lower drawer of a file cabinet, her back to me, as I opened the door.

She turned as I closed the door.

She had high cheekbones, in an interesting, attractive face. She had a delicate complexion. Her blue eyes were dark and intelligent, seeming larger than they were because of the red-rimmed glasses she wore. The red of the rims, I noticed, matched her nail polish.

A fine figure from the front, too. This was one of those girls with glasses at which men *would* make passes. If one were that kind of man, of course.

"I'm Miss Ritter," she said. "Mr. Delahunt's secretary. You're the gentleman who phoned?"

I nodded.

"Mr. Brown, is it? Galveston Brown?"

"Believe it or not," I replied. "Silly name, isn't it?"

She smiled. "Not bad. Easy to remember." She paused, frowning. "I wondered, after you'd called, if the business you had with Mr. Delahunt was anything I could help you with."

"It was an address I wanted from

him," I told her, "the address of a man named Harry Kelvic."

"Kelvic?" Then she made an impatient gesture. "Oh, of course, *her* husband. You're the detective Mr. Delahunt has hired, Mr. Brown?"

"That's right."

"I don't have—" she began, and then the door opened and Rolf Delahunt entered.

He shook his head at my question. "It wasn't something I was particularly interested in. I do remember, though, that there's a certain bar he frequents. Both times I met him it was in there." His eyes were ruminative. "You know, he's my first choice. Of all the names I gave you, his makes the most sense. Because Ellen told me when he's drunk he's capable of anything. And one of the times I met him he was really drunk. I've never heard language as foul as his, that night—"

"She was married to him for some time?" I broke in.

"For five years. Five years of the rottenest kind of abuse. There's your answer to whether she was cold or not, whether she was loyal."

"For three million dollars," I thought, "a guy can buy a lot of loyalty." But I didn't say it, not to him. I didn't even think it of her particularly, just of women generally.

He gave me the address of the bar, and I left.

It was getting warmer, I thought. It wasn't much more than ten above, but there was a little wind and a few scattered flakes of snow.

I drove over to the bar he'd named, a narrow, long spot called the Blackbird. A long bar and a long mirror behind it and cove lighting, the bottles various and plentiful and cleverly arranged along the back bar.

Three men in white jackets and black bow ties, equally well scrubbed, equally alert. I asked, "Does a Mr. Harry Kelvic come in here very often?" and flashed the buzzer.

"Mr. Kelvic?" The neat black eyebrows up, the smile patronizing. "No, not any more. But he did leave a message for any of his friends who might ask. The Red Lantern, he said, would get his trade." He paused to smile knowingly. "That's down near the docks, right off River Street and Chelsea."

"I've heard of it," I told him, and ordered a rye.

I hated to take the Hisso down into a neighborhood like that; not only because she's a snob, but because there were characters down there who might find accessories of value on her. I took her to the garage, and traveled down in a cab.

It was the lower half of a dilapidated two-story house. There were three sagging wooden steps to climb, a door that had once been glass but was now cardboard.

A high, cold, bleak-looking room, smelling of beer and sweat. The bartender looked like he'd left his youth in the ring, and he probably had.

I said, "I'm looking for a man named Harry Kelvic."

He nodded toward the end of the bar. "There he is. Just spent his last dime."

The man at the end of the bar

had long, ragged blond hair, a tall, thin man dressed in soiled tweeds and a frayed topcoat. His eyes were brown and friendly. They were also glazed, at the moment.

"You don't know me, Mr. Kelvic," I said, "but my name is Galveston Brown. I'm a private investigator."

The brown eyes were suddenly crafty and hard. "What do you want?"

"Just to buy you a drink, and talk a little."

The hardness was gone, the craftiness remained. "I'll take the drink, first."

We both had rye, and that was the beginning. There were a lot more after that, and a lot of talk. We made the rounds. Finally, we wound up at the Blackbird, at Harry's insistence.

"Here's where I met her," he said, looking around the room. "Here's where I fell in love with her, and she fell in love with my money." His eyes were bright, his cheeks glowing. "She thought I didn't know that. But I'm no bum, see? I'm no dummy."

"You must have had some wonderful times going through that kind of money," I suggested.

"Sure, sure. I gave her a big allowance, you understand. I was very generous with her. But she charged everything, just the same. I guess she thought I didn't know she was salting it. I knew."

"And you've lost it all now. You haven't any income now?"

That craftiness in his face again. "I haven't any money. I'm not working." His eyes slid past mine, and he was looking into space again. "But I know where I can get money any time I need it. For the rest of my life, I think I know where I can get a little money if I need it."

"A relative?" I asked as casually as possible.

He didn't answer right away. "Nosey, aren't you?" he said finally. "You shouldn't ask questions like that, Galveston. We want to stay friends, don't we, Galveston?" His voice was rising; some of the standees at the bar turned to look at us.

One of the customers at the bar I hadn't noticed before. It was Ned Woody of homicide, Detjen's right-hand man. His eyes met mine quizzically, but I shook my head.

Harry Kelvic stood now, and said some words that didn't belong in such a nice place. He said them so all could hear.

The bartender at our end was coming out from behind the bar, and it didn't take a Rhodes scholar to see we were about to get the bounce. Ned, too, was coming over.

I stood up. "Let's get out of this joint, Harry. I don't like the people here."

At my side, Ned said, "Trouble, Galvy?"

I shook my head. "My friend and I are leaving, that's all. We've got a right to leave, haven't we, Harry?"

"I've got my car outside," Ned said. "Let's all go together."

"You—" Kelvic began, and stared at Ned. "Who invited you along? I've had all I want of you. I don't

like your looks, see? I don't like your kind of questions either."

"A man has to do his duty, Mr. Kelvic," Ned said quietly.

"Sucking the taxpayer's blood, that's your duty, you—"

The bartender was here now, and he put a careful hand on Kelvic's arm. "We can't have that kind of talk in here, Mr. Kelvic. This is a respectable place."

Kelvic started to swing, but Ned had his arm before the blow could land. Between us, we managed to get him out and into the department car at the curb.

"Where next, Harry?" I asked. "Don't you think we ought to have something to eat?"

"I'm not eating," he replied. "Take me home, you—"

I looked at Ned, and Ned nodded. "I know where it is, a flea bag over on Chelsea."

Kelvic belched, and for a moment I thought he was going to be sick. But then he leaned back in the seat, his eyes closed.

Nobody said anything until the car pulled up in front of a leaning frame building in a disreputable block on Chelsea. There was a single dim bulb over the sign, "Sailor's Rest."

I shook Harry Kelvic and he came to with a start. Then he saw the sign and started to climb from the car. His legs were unsteady but still usable. He stood outside a moment, looking in at me through the open door of the car.

"I wonder, Galveston— I should eat tomorrow. I thought maybe, a couple bucks—"

I gave him a couple of bucks. His hands touched mine as he took them; they were like pieces of ice. "I'll see you again, Harry," I told him.

"Sure," he said, "sure," and he was walking toward the entrance to the Sailor's Rest.

From the front seat, Ned said, "You'd better sit up here where this heater can get at you."

I got out and stood on the sidewalk a moment, watching Harry Kelvic go through the doorway to home. Above, in the northern sky, the brightest star of them all, Sirius, seemed to be winking at me.

II.

Miss Ritter said, "He should be back any moment, Mr. Brown. He has a luncheon appointment at one, and it's almost twelve thirty now."

She was wearing a green gabardine suit this noon and looking very luscious. The frames of her glasses didn't match her nail polish today; they were an intriguing yellow. She sat behind her desk in the outer office going through some mail.

I took a chair, not too far away, and said, "I should have phoned, I suppose. I wanted to tell him I'd seen Harry Kelvic last night."

She shook her head sadly. "She certainly used him, didn't she?"

"I guess so."

"I know how Rolf feels about that," she went on, "and how he hates the man. But I wonder if Harry Kelvic was always like that?

I wonder if the abuse was so one-sided."

"From what I've read about marriage," I said, "the abuse is *never* one-sided."

She had a nice laugh, low and melodious. "A cynic, Mr. Brown?"

"Not quite." I paused. "Mr. Delahunt was really carrying the torch, wasn't he?"

She nodded. "It certainly seemed that way." And now she looked at me evenly. "It would have been the worst thing in the world for him. He'd have been writing that light, sophisticated stuff the rest of his life, all for her."

"That's bad?" I asked. "That doesn't pay?"

"That's bad," she replied. "Rolf Delahunt, Mr. Brown, despite what the so-called critics might think, is a highly gifted person. Rolf Delahunt can go just as far as his ambition carries him. But he won't do it writing for money alone."

"He's clever," I admitted, "very clever."

She was lighting a cigarette. "He's more than that. And some day he'll prove it." She looked at me. "Money isn't everything, Mr. Brown."

I didn't argue with her; I'd never had enough money to know if it was everything or not. I lighted a cigarette myself, and studied her alligator pumps peeping out from this side of the desk. To most women money means clothes and clothes are *about* everything.

I was pursuing this thought reflectively when the door opened and Rolf Delahunt came in.

He looked a little less haggard this morning, almost well-fed. He was wearing a British raglan tweed overcoat that made my new fleece look like a bargain-basement job. He gestured me into the inner office and stopped to talk to Miss Ritter a moment.

It was a fairly small room, this creative den of his, done in masculine, simple grays, with a bookshelf covering two of the walls. There was a row of filing cabinets in here, and a desk and two chairs, neither of them comfortable. There was a typewriter and a dictating machine.

I was looking over the titles of the books when he entered some moments later.

"At considerable expense to you," I told him, "I learned that Harry Kelvic can out-drink me, and I was cheating most of the night."

He didn't smile. "The man's an alcoholic, a medical case. He'd be better off dead."

"One man's opinion," I thought. I said, "He's not far from the grave if he keeps it up. I felt kind of sorry for him."

"So did Ellen, and suffered because of it. Sympathy for a man like that is wasted, Mr. Brown."

"Maybe," I thought, "he had better stick to the light, sophisticated stuff." I said, "I didn't learn anything from him that would help my investigation. At least, I don't think I did. He mentioned something about a source of money. He might mean blackmail, which could be a lead. I haven't seen any of the others so far."

"A source of money?" He looked startled. "If that were true, it could, it would mean someone else is the killer?"

"It could." I paused and then took the jump. "Were you hoping it was Harry Kelvic, Mr. Delahunt?"

He didn't take offense. He said thoughtfully, "Maybe I was. It's not an easy confession to make, but I honestly believe I was, and I probably hired you to prove it."

This self-analysis was mildly embarrassing to us both. I said, "If I'm retained further, I intend to work without any bias."

He nodded quickly. "Of course, of course. And I want you to stay with it." He rose and smiled. "If you haven't had lunch, perhaps we could have it together. Miss Ritter and I are lunching with Mark Whistler."

Mark Whistler was one of the men I'd intended to question, one of Ellen's former admirers. I said, "I'd be glad to accept. I can kill two birds with one stone."

"You'll be tactful?" he said. "This Whistler has more money and less caution than anyone in the business. I'm trying to get him to back me in an experiment, a new type of drama."

"I'll be a regular diplomat," I promised.

Mark Whistler was an angel who'd picked a few winners and gone heavily into a couple of turkeys. He wasn't nearly as old as I'd expected him to be.

He was a heavy, dignified man about forty, and he shook my hand solemnly when I was introduced to him at the Scribbler's about half an hour later.

"I've heard of you, Mr. Brown," he said. "Didn't you have something to do with that Dr. Randall business?"

"I worked on it," I admitted modestly.

"Murder," he went on, "has a strange fascination for me. I've read all the accounts of the famous cases in which there was any exceptional detection work."

We settled ourselves at the table; I took a chair across from Miss Ritter, just for the view.

"I suppose," Whistler continued, "you're being employed professionally on this unfortunate business about Ellen Charles?"

I nodded. I tried to associate the dignity of Whistler with this interest in violence, and failed.

He was smiling now. "And Rolf's brought you along so you could examine me? I'm one of the suspects, I suppose?"

Rolf was faintly flushed. Miss Ritter seemed to be proofreading the menu.

"Not quite," I answered easily. "I happened to be in the office as he and Miss Ritter were leaving for lunch. I suppose the police have already asked you more questions than necessary."

Miss Ritter made a valiant effort to pour some oil. "The police don't overlook anybody, do they? Even those unfortunates who have the haziest connection with the case."

"That's the first rule, Alice,"

Whistler told her, "in work of that kind. Don't overlook anything. It's surprising how even the slightest clue may prove extremely valuable. Am I right, Mr. Brown?"

"You certainly are," I agreed.

Rolf Delahunt said, "Let's talk about something else." His thin face was grim, his eyes haunted.

Whistler smiled the patronizing smile of a desired customer. "I'm sorry, Rolf. It was rather cold-blooded conversation, wasn't it? I want to remind all of you, though, that I had as deep an affection for Ellen as anybody." He was looking at Delahunt as he said this, and he repeated emphatically, "As anybody."

Rolf Delahunt met that gaze squarely, and his face was terribly grim. "You did like hell," he said. "Ellen knew what you were after all right."

Whistler's face was stone.

Alice Ritter gasped, "Rolf—"

Delahunt was rising now. He looked down at Whistler. "To hell with you, and to hell with all your money." He turned and strode off.

Alice Ritter half rose, and her voice was hoarse, "Rolf, please—"

But he didn't hear her; he was almost at the door.

Mark Whistler was smiling, and he put a hand on Alice's arm. "It's all right. It was my fault."

At the doorway, Rolf Delahunt was putting on his coat, his back to us.

"He's been under such a terrific strain," Alice apologized for him. "This thing that happened to Ellen, and trying to maintain a fresh approach to his new play— You must forgive him, Mr. Whistler. He's not like other men, you know."

He nodded. "I know he isn't. It was my fault. It was very thoughtless of me." He looked at me. "Now let's pretend nothing has happened and order lunch."

Alice Ritter's gaze left the doorway and came back to rest on Whistler. There was no animosity in her eyes.

I thought, "If he's an angel, I'm a saint," and wondered how objective his interest in murder was.

He made good dialogue; that much I'll grant him. He was familiar with all the interesting murders of the past decade, and Rolf's absence seemed to be an excuse for reopening the subject.

"I've always wanted to back a first-rate mystery play," he said, "but I've never found one. There is too much concern with the mechanics of the deduction, and far too little with the literary impact of violent death. Most mystery writers can't match the real thing for drama."

He sat there, looking like a small-town banker and talking like a ghoul, while I sat watching Alice Ritter. She was trying to show an interest in the conversation, but her heart wasn't in it, I could tell. She was worrying about Rolf Delahunt.

Some men have all the luck.

She didn't stay for coffee. She apologized for having to leave, but she had to know if Rolf were all

right. He was so impulsive, so impetuous.

When she'd left, Whistler said, "You're working for Rolf Delahunt, Mr. Brown. That was clever of him, don't you think, employing a detective?"

I frowned. "In what way?"

"He probably had nothing to do with it," Mark Whistler went on, "but I'm sure the police think he had. This act of his allays suspicion."

"I see what you mean, but I think as you do about that, he had nothing to do with it."

I wondered how dumb he thought the police were. I wondered how much of a going-over Detjen had given him.

"He's clever," Whistler said thoughtfully and meaningly. "He's an exceptionally clever man." He paused, as though studying the effect of his words on me. "More coffee, Mr. Brown?"

I left him after lunch, and went back to the office. The air was sharp and clear, but what wind there was lacked the bite of the evening before. In my office, the steam radiator was hissing; the place was dry and hot.

There wasn't any mail except some circulars. I phoned the department and asked if Ned Woody were around.

He was, and I had him on the wire in a minute. "How about this Mark Whistler?" I asked him. "What have you got on him?"

"Nothing but a lot of answers to some questions. He was covered for some time. What have you got on him?"

"Nothing" I answered. "And how about Harry Kelvic?" I paused. "What's his alibi?"

"He hasn't got any. Somebody who looked a lot like him was seen around the girl's apartment building that night. He's a good choice for No. 1."

"You didn't tell me that last night," I accused him. "Where's all this co-operation the chief talks about?"

"I co-operate two ways," Ned said, "if you follow me?"

"With Detjen, too, you mean?"

"That earns you sixty-four dollars," Ned said. "How about my picking you up at the office, and we'll run down to Chelsea Street, just to see what's cooking?"

"I'll be waiting," I told him.

I put my new overcoat carefully on a chair and poured myself a slug of rye. I kept thinking about Mark Whistler, and wondering if it were jealousy alone that prompted his treatment of Delahunt. I was still wondering about him when I heard the toot of Woody's horn, outside.

"Detjen know you're picking me up?" I asked, as I climbed into the department car.

"He didn't ask. He isn't interested." He shook his head. "He's sort of under a cloud around headquarters, now, you know. That last time you tangled—" He shook his head. "The chief thinks a lot of you, Brownie."

With Woody as boss of homicide, I'd get all the co-operation I wanted.

probably. And Ned would like the job, even if he had to cut Detjen's throat to get it. I don't know why I should feel dissatisfied, unless it was because of the pleasure I'd always found in bucking Detjen.

The Sailor's Rest looked even bleaker by daylight, its tilt almost ominous. We went up the steps to the doorway and into the cubicle that was the lobby.

Cold in here and odorous, all the odors of careless living. A bald, toothless man with weary eyes sat behind the small desk. He was wearing a sweater under his frayed blue coat.

He rose, and swung the register around our way, but Ned flashed his badge, and said, "I'd like to talk to Mr. Kelvic."

The man's tired eyes showed no interest. "Mr. Kelvic checked out this morning, late." He sniffed. "At my request."

Ned looked at me, then back at the aged clerk. "Behind in his rent?"

"Mostly. Noisy, always looking for trouble, too. But if he'd paid up, that wouldn't matter."

"He left a forwarding address?"

The man sniffed again. "How could he? Who'd take him? No, he just left."

Ned turned away, and said to me, "I should have locked him up when I had the chance. He'll be something to find."

We went out to the car again. "How about this maid of hers she'd had the fight with?" I asked.

Ned shrugged. "She was at a show. Nobody saw her there, but nobody saw her anywhere else, either. I'm going back to headquarters and talk to Detjen. This Kelvic being on the loose was his idea."

"Drop me off, then," I told him. "I'd like to talk to the maid."

"Maid?" she said. "I suppose I could be called that. Those are her words for it."

She wasn't what I'd expected. She was a fairly tall girl with an expressive, intelligent face and a calm poise. Her gray eyes met mine honestly, as she went on to explain about her relationship to Ellen Charles.

She'd had a few walk-on parts; she'd admired Ellen Charles from afar, and met her at a party.

"I thought she liked me; coming to live with her was her idea, not mine. I was to be a companion, I was to be her protegé. I knew there was plenty she could teach me and it was an opportunity I couldn't refuse." Norah Boone's voice was bitter. "I learned I wasn't the first. Ellen Charles couldn't stand to be alone; what she wanted was a companion who didn't even get a maid's wages."

"Afraid to be alone?" I asked.

"Afraid of her former husband, I'm sure. He came, to threaten her, a few times while I was there. I didn't share her fear; he could be reasoned with, I learned."

"He was bitter about the divorce?"

She nodded. "His ego, more than anything, I think. He couldn't stand the thought of anyone marrying him

for his money rather than his beauty. He has a great regard for himself."

"I'm no dummy. I'm no bum—"

"You think," I asked, "he could have—"

She shrugged. "I've been told that almost anybody can commit murder, under the proper influence. I'm sure the police think I'm capable of it."

"And this quarrel you had with Miss Charles?"

She sighed, and looked down at the floor. "It was about a man we both knew, the man who introduced me to her."

"Albert Spooner?"

She looked startled. "That's right. You know of him?"

"I'm a private operative," I explained, "but I'm working with the police on this, Miss Boone. I was told about Spooner."

"The police seem to think I'm in love with him, but I'm not," she said. "He has, I think, exceptional talent, and I admire him tremendously."

"He's a writer?"

"He intends to be. He's written enough, though none of it's been published or produced."

"Miss Charles admired him, too?"

"Miss Charles admired his youth."

I said nothing for a moment.

She smiled, a smile with some mockery in it. "No more questions, Mr. Brown?"

"One more," I answered. "Why don't we go out and get a drink?"

She looked at me doubtfully, not smiling now.

"You're lonely," I said. "I'm lonely and weary and harmless. We could talk or you could tell me fascinating things about your life behind the footlights."

The smile was back. "It's too cold to go out, and I've no liquor in the place. But I could make you a cup of cocoa, and you could tell me all about the brilliant detective work you've done."

But we talked about Ellen Charles and Rolf Delahunt and what were the Russians up to?

An interesting, pleasant, heart-warming girl, this Norah Boone, and an excellent cocoa-maker. In the colorful living room of her small apartment, the winter shadows lengthened as we talked.

At five thirty, I said, "Why don't you phone this Spooner lad and we'll all go out to dinner on my expense account?"

"So you could question him?" Some chill in her smile.

"Partly. And so you could see him again. You want to, don't you?"

She stared at me for seconds. "You like to think you're perceptive, don't you? Why should I want to see him?"

"All right," I said, "I'm sorry. I made a mistake."

She looked at the floor again. "I wouldn't phone him, if he—" She shook her head, and I thought I saw the glisten of tears.

"You're too sensible a girl to succeed in fooling yourself," I said quietly. "You can tell him that I wanted to see both of you, together."

Again she stared at me, and then she smiled. "You don't look like

cupid. All right, I'll try. After all, I was the one who started the quarrel."

The phone wasn't here; it was in the hall, outside, so I didn't hear the conversation. But she looked happy when she came back to the apartment. "He'll be over in ten minutes," she said, "and we can leave from here."

This Albert Spooner was young, young and uncertain. He had warm brown eyes and sandy hair and an apologetic way of speaking. He shook my hand firmly as we were introduced, as though to make up in that gesture for his lack of aggressiveness.

It didn't take a crystal ball to see he was in love with Norah Boone. I admired his taste, there.

We went to the Scribbler's. Not because I had any affection for the place, but I knew they would have. Neither of them acted like lovers in the cab trip over.

We had a drink first, and while we were drinking it, I asked him, "Just how close were you to Miss Charles, Al?"

He looked frankly puzzled. "Close?"

"You loved her?"

"Oh, golly, no," he protested, and his voice was earnest. "I never thought of her that way, at all. But she could help me, you understand, Mr. Brown? She was way up there, and I'm certainly not so stupid I'd refuse help from anyone as high in the profession as—"

Norah Boone's face seemed to glow at the obvious honesty of Spooner's explanations. "Just because I haven't a bow," I thought, "she needn't think I can't play cupid."

I said, "I suppose you're covered for the time, for the period in which Miss Charles was killed."

He nodded. "I've been cleared by the police." He was looking thoughtfully. "What I can't understand is the way the police accept that Delahunt story. There isn't anyone to confirm it. Nobody was there at his apartment, and nobody came with Miss Charles. Wouldn't it be logical to think he's the one?"

"It wouldn't be logical to think he'd do it in that way."

"Not the way he explained it, no. But if they had a fight, and he did shoot her without any premeditation, he'd have to have some excuse, wouldn't he? Witnesses would testify she was going to his apartment, and he'd have to have some kind of story ready."

"She was shot on the second floor," I explained, "and that let's him out, more or less. Because that would be premeditated if he went down there to wait for her. And if it was premeditated, he wouldn't be dumb enough to do it in a way that would put him so clearly in the soup."

"He's not in the soup, not at all," Spooner pointed out, "and he could have done it that way."

"He's under suspicion," I said. "Why do they all want to play Hawkshaw?" I thought. First Mark Whistler, and now this lad.

I looked over to see the man I'd

thought of, Mark Whistler, sitting all alone, about three tables away.

I excused myself, and went over to say, "Why don't you join us? I've an incipient Shaw and an apprentice Duse over there. Maybe you could get him to write that mystery you're looking for."

The kids, I could see, were impressed when I brought Whistler back with me, though Norah managed to disguise her awe better than Spooner.

From then on the talk centered around two topics, murder and the theater. Spooner, under the spell of his own words, lost his diffidence, and did the major share of the talking.

When they were still talking at nine o'clock, I decided I'd had enough. I left some bills on the table. I said, "This is all on Rolf Delahunt. That's his money. But I've still some work to do."

I couldn't honestly charge it up to Delahunt, but they wouldn't protest if they thought it a legitimate expense. They didn't protest about my leaving, either, not nearly as much as they should.

I took a cab to the office, and picked up the Hisso. She sighed, as I started her, as though remonstrating with me for my neglect.

"I may sell you," I told her, "and get me a girl. I'm not at all sure you're an adequate substitute."

She snorted in her carburetor, a scornful snort. A lot of vanity in her.

There was a hint of warmth in the air, not a summer's warmth, but a definite change from the sharp cold we'd been suffering.

At headquarters, I was told that Ned Woody had gone home for the day. I drove from there down to River Street, to the Red Lantern.

Art was behind the bar; the two cribbage players looked like they had never left the place. A group of five men played poker at the big corner table.

"Evening, Mr. Brown," Art said. "What'll it be tonight?"

"Rye," I answered. "Have you seen Harry Kelvic today?"

He nodded. "Saw him at noon. Wanted a couple bucks off me, for a room. Came in drunk, so he must'a spent his dough some place else." Art shook his head. "Big shot, I guess, at one time, huh?"

"Millionaire," I said. "He was married to Ellen Charles, that actress who was just killed."

Some emotion registered on his battered face. Whether it was disbelief, or wonder, or both, I couldn't tell.

"He came here quite a lot?" I asked.

"When he had the money."

"You don't know where he got it when he didn't have the money?"

Art shook his head. "It wouldn't be a spot like this. It'd be one of those ritzy joints, more'n likely."

Without knowing where to start, it would be senseless to take up Harry Kelvic's trail tonight. I drank my rye, and went home to bed. I slept the sleep of the innocent and young, neither of which I am.

III.

"Joe's all right," Mike said. "He don't dodge nobody, and that's more'n you can say about lots of heavy champs. But I tell you there's times when he gets flustered, and a really fast, smart, tough boy would take him, then. Joe don't like to be scored on."

"For my money," I said, "he's the cleanest, hardest-hitting champ we've ever had, and I don't want to talk any more about it."

It was a fairly warm morning, one of those freak days that come in February, some years. I was eating two fried eggs with toast and dialogue, all prepared by Mike.

"Well, let's talk about Ellen Charles then," Mike said. "What's new on that, Brownie?"

"How should I know?" I countered, studying him.

"Don't give me that," he argued. "Don't I know you got a pipeline into headquarters? They don't even redecorate down there without they ask you first."

"I'll have another cup of coffee, please," I said.

He didn't go to get it right away. "Why don't you want to talk about Ellen Charles?"

"She has feet of clay," I told him. "Don't bother me this morning, Mike. I'm in a bad mood."

He went to get more coffee. He was plainly in a sulky mood. He brought the pot back and poured my cup full, saying nothing.

Somebody came through the door, but I didn't turn to see who it was. I heard the door close, and feet, heavy feet, walking toward me. Then the voice, "I'd like to talk to you, Brown, as soon as you're through. In your office."

I looked up into the sour, thin face of Detjen. Something seemed to come alive in me, and I realized I needed this man to give my life its competitive, combative edge.

He was subdued this morning. He was, as Ned said, under a cloud down at headquarters. But the malevolence that glistened in his pig eyes was as strong as ever.

"I'm practically through now," I told him. "Just this second cup of coffee and I'll be with you."

He took a seat across the table from me, saying nothing. Mike looked from him to me and back, as though expecting an eruption. I lighted a cigarette and sipped my coffee.

Detjen said quietly, "Don't rub it in too much, Brown. I've got a good memory."

"So have I," I said. "You've made me jump through enough hoops in your time. That time's over." I put out my cigarette and rose. "Let's go."

Mike wasn't missing anything or saying anything. We went out into the unseasonable day and along to my office. Up the worn wooden steps and down the hall, neither of us saying a word.

In my office, Detjen didn't seat himself but went over to stand next to the window. His voice was strained. "Ned Woody's been han-

dling this Charles case. Ned's all right, but he's got one weakness."

"I didn't ask what it was. I knew he wanted me to.

Detjen turned. "He trusts you. He should know by now that you work only for the money you can make on a case."

I didn't ask what it was. I knew

A silence, and then, "You've got Harry Kelvic some place, haven't you?"

I stared at him in surprise. "Hell, no!"

"Don't lie to me. You gave him money the night you and Harvey took him home. You were down in that district again last night. I haven't Ned's faith in you; I had a man on you."

I started to say something, but he raised a hand. "I know every place you went yesterday. You saw them all. You brought three of them together over at that Scribbler's restaurant. Who you making the deal for, Brown?"

"I'm not making any deal," I replied as calmly as I could. "I gave Harry Kelvic two dollars. Maybe you call that money. I saw them all yesterday, because I'm investigating them all. Look, it was the chief's idea I get onto this merry-go-round. If you've got any kicks on that, kick to him. If he tells me to quit, I will. But don't get any ideas about intimidating me, because I'm in the clear all the way."

His belligerence didn't become active. He stared at me for some seconds and then came over to sit in my customer's chair. "That Kelvic may be the killer, and he may know who the killer is. One of those two things I'm sure of. I'm certain, in my mind, that he was around her apartment that night. He might be the man to break down Delahunt's story. Anyway, we've been combing the town for him."

"I'm surprised he wasn't locked up right away," I said.

"That was my idea. You probably know that was my idea. I figured him for a lush, and I figured if he got soused enough, he'd get careless and we'd learn something. Even you should see the sense of that."

"It makes sense," I agreed, "only you didn't keep a man on him all the time."

"He was Ned's baby," Detjen said, and there was satisfaction in his voice. "Ned's the one who lost him." He paused then and came as close to a smile as that face knew. "And if you've got him, it's Ned's neck you're slicing."

"You've got your boy on the spot, haven't you?" I accused him. "You think he might want your job."

"I don't worry about Ned," he answered. "He's a good man, generally, and knows how to take orders. But this is my case now, and the chief's behind me, and if you know anything I should know, start telling me."

I told him all I'd learned yesterday, in great and boring detail, knowing that I wasn't telling him anything new. I told him about going to the Red Lantern, and what

I'd learned there about Harry Kelvic.

When I'd finished, he said, "You were looking for Kelvic last night? You weren't taking a message to him through that bartender?"

"I was looking for him."

"You didn't spend much time at it."

"How much time is there in a day? Where the hell would I start? I haven't got an organization behind me; I work alone, and this town is big. You couldn't expect me to do something the whole department is failing in, would you?"

"I would," he said. "The department works above board." He stood up. "If we don't find Harry Kelvic today, we'll make what case we can against your client. I understand he and Miss Charles weren't on the best of terms that day."

He hates me as much as I hate him, I thought. I didn't get up as he went to the door.

If he really wanted to nail Delahunt, I didn't doubt but that he could make out some kind of a case with the D.A. Whitney, the D.A., was his cousin, and they'd worked out some strange cases before. If he could put enough heat on Harry Kelvic, there was a chance Kelvic could have a supporting witness for him. I wondered how far he'd go with the shadow of his last mess still hanging over him.

One thing I knew, this talk of the chief's about co-operation would be just so many words to Detjen.

I went down to the Hisso. The freakish weather was getting more so; it was almost like spring. The Hisso sighed as though admiring it all, as though remembering her youth, as we purred down the wet streets toward the river.

I started with the Red Lantern and worked all the spots he'd taken me to that night. I didn't get anywhere in any of them. The last to see him had been Art, and he'd told me that the night before.

I gave it up around noon and drove over to Delahunt's office. He wasn't in, but Miss Ritter was.

The gabardine again today, and the yellow-rimmed glasses. She was pale and seemed highly keyed up. "I've been trying to get you for an hour," she said. "Some man named Detjen was here, a detective."

"And—"

"He practically accused Rolf of murder. They were just shouting at each other before he left. Rolf's terribly upset—" She shook her head. "He mustn't be disturbed now. This could very well be the turning point of his whole career. Isn't there some way you can protect him from disturbances of this kind, Mr. Brown?"

I shook my head. "Not with Detjen in it. Where did Mr. Delahunt go?"

"I don't know," she said wearily. "He just stormed out without a word. I do hope he isn't going to do any drinking."

"A drink or two wouldn't hurt after seeing Detjen," I told her. "I usually need one myself after that. If he is drinking, where would it be? Hasn't he any favorite haunts?"

She looked thoughtful. "There's

a place on Seventieth—" She tapped her desk top with a pencil. "If you're going to look for him, I'd like to go along. I can soothe him better than anyone."

"I'll be glad to have you," I told her, which was no lie.

The Hisso seemed to smirk when I started her.

Miss Ritter said, "I wonder whatever gave that detective the fantastic notion that Rolf would—" She shook her head. "It's liable to put him off for months."

"He must be delicate," I said, and tried to keep the edge from my voice.

"He's an artist," she said. "He was meant to be a poet. If Mark Whistler hadn't been so crude yesterday—" She sighed. "We'll land that Whistler yet." And then she paused, and a frown began to form. "Do you think by any chance it was Whistler who started this new investigation of Rolf?"

"I've no idea," I said. "Why should he?"

"I don't know, excepting that they were rivals, almost enemies in a way, and Mark Whistler is an important man."

I didn't answer her immediately. I thought about Whistler's interest in murder, but he didn't seem to have any motive but jealousy, and I couldn't picture him as the type who'd let jealousy rule him.

I said, "He's an important man, but not a vindictive one, I'd say. I can't see him as a killer."

"Perhaps not," she admitted, "but it's no more ridiculous than imagining Rolf in the rôle."

It was too nice a day for such morbid thoughts. A false spring day, and I knew it couldn't last, but it wouldn't hurt to dream. We were almost here now.

Tobin's was the name of the place, a standard place with the standard moderne equipment, the standard glossy-haired, white-jacketed bartender, the standard television set.

Rolf Delahunt wasn't at the bar; he was sitting in a small booth at the far end of the narrow room. Even from the doorway, I could tell he was sick.

He had both hands on the table in front of him, the fingers spread rigidly as though to prevent his falling forward. His face wasn't green, but it looked like it should have been, if you follow me. It was a sickly pallid shade, wearing that stupid, expectant, apprehensive expression of a man who is about to become actively sick.

He didn't look like he was going to make the washroom.

It was a time for low voices and the cautious approach, but Alice Ritter went charging over like a mother hen.

"Rolf, you poor, poor dear. What—"

He managed to lift his right hand rigidly aloft for silence, but he didn't trust himself to speak.

I moved in ahead of Miss Ritter, as politely as I could. I said gently, "Try to think of something else, and I'll help you make the place you want to go."

We made it all right.

When he'd finished, he leaned

weakly against the wall of the washroom, shaking his head. He used some words no frustrated poet should know. Detjen's name was in it, and the inference was that Detjen had caused all this.

He went over to wash out his mouth and slosh his face with cold water. When he turned around again, he said, "I can't drink. It doesn't take much to do that to me."

"You were upset," I alibied for him. "You can't drink, nobody can, when they're in an emotional stew. Miss Charles' death and then Detjen, and worrying about your new play—" I don't know what I was apologizing for; I wasn't drunk.

He smiled weakly. "Let's go out," he said. "Alice will be worried."

Alice was worried. Alice started the *yak-yak* almost immediately, but the stricken look on Delahunt's face finally got through and she fell silent.

I said, "Why don't we go and get a cup of coffee?" and they both agreed that might be a good idea.

We found a spot three doors up and went in. Delahunt had his coffee without cream or sugar and began to look almost human.

Alice Ritter had achieved some sense in the past few minutes; she was quiet and soothing and docile.

"If it's not too painful," I said to Delahunt, "just what did Detjen say?"

Delahunt took a deep breath and another slug of coffee. "He said my story was too pat. He said he wasn't the kind of cop that would let a story like that ride, and he wanted to know what had caused us to quarrel."

"Quarrel?" I said.

"We hadn't. This Detjen was trying to bait me."

"A habit of his," I said. "After this, don't let him get to you. He's probably telling all the suspects the same story, and—"

"Suspects?" he repeated. "You mean, right along I've been a suspect in this?"

"That's right. You're bound to be. There were no witnesses to any of it, none but yourself. Outside of Harry Kelvic, I'd say you were the first choice."

Delahunt put his face into his open hands and blew out his breath. The hands were still shaky, the face pale. "I think," he said slowly, "I'll take a walk. I need the air. Would you like to walk with me, Alice?"

She didn't need to answer; her face showed how much she'd like it.

I said tactfully, "I'll run along. I want to check in at the office."

Both of Alice's hands were holding one of his when I left. I envied him a little.

There was a department car parked in front when I stopped the Hisso in front of my office some minutes later. Ned Woody was sitting in it.

He said, "Let's go."

"Go where and why?" I asked him. "Don't sound like Detjen."

"They're Detjen's words," he answered me. "He's waiting for you just four blocks from here."

I climbed into the car. "What's it all about?"

Ned didn't answer right away.

Finally, he asked, "Do you know where Delahunt is? We've called his office and his apartment. We can't locate him anywhere."

"Delahunt's sick," I said. "He's out for a walk."

The car slowed, and Ned turned to stare at me. "That's what Kelvic said, just those two words—'Delahunt's sick.' Now how in the hell would he know that?"

"I'm sure I don't know. You found Harry Kelvic then?"

"Sure," Ned replied. "We found him. We found him dead."

I tried to keep from showing my annoyance. "You found him dead? But he told you Delahunt was sick?"

"No, he told the landlady. Just before he died, he said that to her."

"How did he die?"

"Poison," Ned said. "That's almost sure, anyway. Doc'll be sure by this time. He was just getting there when I left."

It was a rooming house, a shabby place on a shabby, quiet, dead-end street off Monroe. There was a crowd on the sidewalk, and a uniformed man blocking the front door.

Doc Waters' wagon was there, and they were bringing a body down on the stretcher, two white-coated men. The body was covered with a blanket, all covered, including the face. The crowd stared and for a moment there was an unbelievable silence. Then the hum of conversation, the low voices of everyone talking at once.

Ned and I moved through the crowd, up the walk, and past the uniformed man at the doors.

We went into a cool, damp hall. There were some steps here at the front end of the hallway, an open stairway of handsome, polished oak. This had once been an impressive private home.

"It's on the second floor," Ned said, and we went up.

In a large front room, Detjen was waiting with Doc Waters. Detjen was scowling, and his scowl didn't lessen when he saw me. There was another person in the room, a woman. She stood near the window looking out, a thin, tired-looking woman of middle age.

"You bring Delahunt?" Detjen asked Ned.

Ned shook his head. "I thought I'd better bring Brownie over first. Delahunt's sick. He's out walking the streets."

The woman turned at that. "That's what Mr. Kelvic said. That's it. 'Delahunt's sick,' that's what he said."

"Sure, he's sick," Detjen said, and tapped his forehead. "Up here he's sick. All killers are. But that won't keep him from the chair." He turned to me. "Where's your client, Brown?"

As calmly as I could I told him all that had happened. I said, "He should be right up in that neighborhood. He's probably walking slowly. He's in bad shape. Miss Ritter will be with him."

Detjen said to Ned, "Go get him. Take him down to the station. I'll be there in a little while."

To the woman Detjen said, "That will be all for now, Mrs. Harder. We'll be leaving right away."

She was obviously reluctant to go, but wanted no argument with the law. When she was going through the door, Detjen turned to me.

"I suppose," he said hastily, "it's just a coincidence this Kelvic was living here the last couple days."

"I don't know what you mean," I told him.

"Don't you? Four blocks from your office he's living."

Doc Waters said, "I'll be running along, Detjen. I'll report to the chief."

Detjen nodded, not looking at him. As the song goes, he only had eyes for me.

"Why don't we all run down and see the chief?" I suggested. "Before you do anything rash, Detjen."

"Don't worry about me," Detjen said. "You can put in all your time fretting about yourself from here in. Because the least I'm going to do to you is get your license. I'm not going to miss this time, Brown."

"For a man your age," I told him, "you do a lot of jumping."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"The way you jump at a conclusion. I know it saves thinking, but it wastes time, too. Thousands of people can live within a four-block radius of my office, you know. It's just a coincidence that Kelvic was staying here. Or maybe it isn't. Maybe he wanted to be close enough to watch the office, for reasons of his own."

"Sure, sure," Detjen said. "And he tells that landlady Delahunt's sick. And you tell me you're trying to help Delahunt get well again. So there must be something fishy about his sickness. Maybe he drank the same stuff Kelvic did, but not as much of it. Maybe he wanted to show Kelvic it was all-right stuff, but made a mistake. Whatever happened, you're right in there covering for him, aren't you?"

"I'm not covering murder. I never have."

"Not that we know of," Detjen said. "But there's probably plenty about you we don't know."

"I've told you all I know on this business."

He studied me, not saying anything for a moment. Then he said, "Go back to your office and stay there. I'm going down to headquarters to talk to the chief. I'll phone you from the office." He started for the door. "I expect to find you at the office when I call."

I waited until he had left the house, and then went downstairs to talk to the landlady. She had the front room on the first floor, and her door was open.

She seemed unusually willing to talk about it. She'd heard a "thump" upstairs, and gone up to find Harry Kelvic on the floor, his door open. There was an empty glass on the floor, a bottle of Scotch on the dresser, with only a few drinks gone, one of those pinch bottles.

"He looked awful." Her eyes seemed to glory in the memory, despite her words. "He couldn't get his breath, having the most terrible convulsions. There was a smell like

mice, sort of, and he was trying to talk, and staring at me. All he could say was 'Delahunt's sick,' and then he sort of doubled up and died right there."

Smell like mice! I asked, "Did the police identify the poison?"

"Canine," she guessed. "I think it was canine, but that's a dog, isn't it?"

"Conine?" I suggested, using the long e pronunciation.

She nodded eagerly. "That's it. It's a poison?"

"I don't know," I lied, "but thank you just the same."

From there I drove back to the office. Conine, with any kind of pronunciation, isn't something a casual purchaser can obtain. It would indicate premeditation over some period of time previous to the murder: it wasn't so available one could pick it up on the way to a killing. Conine, canine, conine. The alliteration kept running through my mind for some reason, and then a thought hit me.

Maybe Doc Waters had used the other pronunciation, which would be closer to canine. Maybe I had a lead.

In my office I sat and smoked until the phone rang. It wasn't Detjen, it was the chief.

He said, "Detjen's told me his story. I think he's off the beam, Galvy. I'm supporting you as long as I can. We've got your client, though. We're holding him for a while."

"I see," I said. "Thanks for the support. Is Ned Woody around? I'd like to talk to him."

"No, he's out. I sent him out myself a few minutes ago. Is there a message for him?"

I told him what I'd planned and the sources I wanted checked. I told him about the thought that had hit me, but not the person involved. I was just hanging up when I heard the feet on the stairs.

A few moments later Nora Boone stood in the doorway.

"Hello," I said, "and did Whistler do you two any good?"

She ignored my question. She said, "They've picked up Al. The police are holding him." She came in to stand at the other side of my desk.

"They've picked up Delahunt, too," I told her, "and they'll probably get the others. I wouldn't worry too much about it."

"Not worry? How can I help it? He's—" There were tears, suddenly, and she sat down in my customer's chair.

There's nothing you can do when a woman cries. I did it, smoking all the while.

When she seemed to have stopped a little, I said, "You know he's innocent, and so do I. The police will learn it, too."

"Couldn't I get a lawyer?" she asked. "Wouldn't that be the best thing to do?"

"The best thing," I answered, "would be to go out and have lunch with me right now. I'm starving. We could eat right down the block if you're not fussy."

"I'm not fussy, but I don't think I could eat anything."

IV.

Mike's eyebrows lifted, and he smirked as we walked in. "Good afternoon," he said in his most cultured voice. "May I be of service?"

"It would depend upon your cuisine," I told him.

He looked puzzled, and I added, "What's to eat?"

There was beef stew, he told me, and I looked at Nora. She nodded, and we took a table near the bar.

"Did Ellen Charles do much drinking?" I asked her.

She nodded. "More than most people knew. She drank quite often when she was alone, though I never saw her when she didn't have control of herself."

"You'd consider her a drinker, though?"

Again she nodded. "Why?"

"Because I think the same person killed her who killed Harry Kelvic. I think the poison was originally meant for her."

"Harry Kelvic?" she said. "Is he . . . was he—"

"He was killed," I told her, "or, anyway, he died. Didn't you know that? Why do you think there's been all this police activity again?"

"I thought it was because of Ellen Charles. I thought they'd decided to prosecute somebody finally. I thought—" She broke off.

"You thought there was a chance Albert Spooner might be railroaded," I finished for her.

"Something like that. And there is a chance, isn't there?"

"Not as much as you might think," I assured her. "Those things happen and get a lot of publicity when they're discovered, but they happen very rarely."

Mike brought over the stew and some rye bread. "Your coffee now or later?" he asked.

We told him we'd take it later, and he smiled at us. A lot of cupid in Mike, just like in Brown.

When he was still within earshot, I asked Norah, "Would you murder a woman who threatened Al's happiness?"

Mike stopped walking, and Norah stared at me. "Of course not," she replied. "Al's perfectly capable of judging and managing his own happiness."

"How about his career?" I asked.

"It's his career," she said. "What are you driving at, Mr. Brown?"

"I'm trying to understand the female mind," I told her. "But, of course, as you told me at your apartment, you don't love this Spooner, though you admire him. Tremendously, wasn't it?"

She made a face. "I love him and you know it, and he knows it. And now he's in trouble, so I can't see the reason for all this light banter. You don't seem to worry about him at all."

Mike was making a pretense of polishing some glasses, but he wasn't missing any words he could help missing.

"His trouble is only temporary," I consoled her. "Even the police will have to admit that he didn't have nearly enough motive, not with a girl like you rooting for him. Take

my word for it, he'll be all right."

"If you knew how much I wanted to believe that," she said.

I wanted to believe it as much as she did. I wanted to think that justice was always triumphant and the guilty punished. Right now I could only believe in her love.

She seemed to be less troubled when she left me.

I sat in my office for nearly an hour after she'd left, letting my hunch grow, the play on words running through my mind. Conine, canine, conine—

The phone rang. It was Mark Whistler.

He said, "I'd expected a little more results when you got on the case, Mr. Brown. They've got me down here again at the station."

"They've got my client, too," I told him. "There's safety in numbers. I'm surprised he hasn't phoned me."

He chuckled. "Alice seems to think an attorney would be more proper. Unless you begin to live up to my picture of you, Mr. Brown, I'll have to share her lack of faith." Again the chuckle. "You know, I'm really enjoying all of it. This Detjen fascinates me."

After he'd hung up, I wondered what his attitude would be if he didn't own half the mint. I wondered if he'd be maintaining the light touch if he already had a few raps against him and no money. Dilettantes in murder give me the shivers.

Then Ned phoned. "Can't get anything much, Brownie. Haven't traced the conine, and there wasn't a witness who had anything on either case. You'd think, in a neighborhood like that—"

"Maybe it was planted last night," I suggested, "and this Kelvic didn't take a drink until he got up. Late at night there wouldn't be many up in this district. They're all working people."

"So what have we got?"

"Nothing," I admitted. "But I'm going to make the try, I think. Will Detjen let you go for a while? If you want to be in on it, the chief will probably back you."

A pause, and then he said, "I'll be over."

Maybe, I thought, she deserved to die. A grasping, climbing, self-seeking star. And this Kelvic wouldn't be much loss to the world. But that wasn't for me to judge. And she had been talented, she had given pleasure to thousands.

I was just getting into my new overcoat when Woody came. "It's too warm for that out," he said.

I told him I didn't feel warm; I was cold-blooded.

I made a phone call, but there was no answer. I said, "We'll try the apartment."

The apartment was over on the Drive, close to Delahunt's, a fact that had escaped me until now. I wondered how it had escaped Detjen; the obvious was his meat.

I told Woody, "You can come up a few minutes later and stand in the hall."

"O.K.," he said. "I hope it's a thin door."

"Maybe it won't matter," I said.

She was home. She met me at her door with a question in her eyes and told me to come in.

The apartment didn't match the gabardine; it was frilly and chintzy. The next adjective should be "homy" but it wasn't that. It didn't look real; it looked like a snare for somebody who needed the maternal touch.

Alice Ritter said, "You haven't been much help in this, Mr. Brown." She motioned me to a chair, and went over to sit on a love seat.

"No," I admitted, "I guess I haven't." I managed, without too much trying, to look extremely worried. "I think I've some bad news for you, too."

She didn't say anything. She was all attention.

"They're going to railroad Delahunt," I went on. "They've got the team to send him to the chair, and they're going to do it."

I couldn't have hit her as hard with my fist. An almost convulsive shudder went through her. "They . . . it's impossible—"

I shook my head wearily. "No, it isn't. It's going to be a fast trial and a quick conviction. I don't know how much you know about these things, but everything's arranged." I paused. "Even the jury." I hoped she didn't know much about these things, or my bluff would fizzle.

She evidently didn't. There was fright in her eyes. There was fear. She tried to say something and failed.

I went on, "Detjen and the D.A. are cousins. The judge is only a second cousin, but he's a very obliging guy. The three of them have worked together before, and it's the important reason for the D.A.'s record. They work as smoothly as the Michigan backfield."

She was shaken. Her defense was a token defense only. "Rolf has the best attorney in town."

"The last man they sent to the chair," I answered, "had the best attorney in the country. It isn't a question of legal procedure of justice or even ethics. They are going to nail him and clean up this case. That's what I learned at headquarters, and you can bank on it."

The face was changing now. Hardness there; all the dominating possessiveness of her was being foiled. "You've been a big help," she accused me. "You've done all this."

"Have I? Don't you think *you* started it when you killed Ellen Charles?"

And now she was motionless, rigid as marble. "Are you insane?"

"And when you poisoned Harry Kelvic. Was he blackmailing you? Didn't he love her enough to want her murderer to pay for the crime? Or was it because he loved alcohol more and wanted money for that?"

"Stop!" she said hoarsely. "This is ridiculous! You're—"

"All kinds of love," I went on. "Yours was too possessive. There wasn't anything or anybody that was going to stop Rolf from reaching the top, was there? And you'd be right there with him. You and he up there among the stars. It must have been a future worth working for, worth killing for. But now, you see, he's

going to die. He's going to die in the electric chair."

"You can't say these things," she whispered. "You haven't any proof. Damn you, you can't—" She was gasping for breath.

"No," I agreed, "I can't do much but watch, knowing in my own mind he's innocent. I'm not bucking the police in this town when they've got a tailor-made case ready to go to market. I just wanted you to know I wasn't as stupid as I seemed.

"Harry Kelvic tried to tell them," I went on. "He said 'Delahunt's *sec*—' They thought he said 'Delahunt's *sick,*' but what he really tried to tell the landlady was 'Delahunt's *secretary,*' only he couldn't get it all out. She heard the 'sec' as 'sick,' a logical mistake, considering that her mind accepted the only word she knew like that."

She was still glaring; she was trembling, too.

"The conine was originally for Ellen Charles, wasn't it? You knew you were going to kill her, one way or another, when the opportunity offered, and you knew she drank. And you could be the only one who knew she was going to Rolf's apartment and at that time. You live close enough to time everything nicely. The gun worked out all right, and you had the conine left. Conine is soluble in alcohol and ready-made for a lush like Kelvic. When did he first start to bother you?"

No words from her; her stare was the stare of an idiot now.

"He probably saw you leave Delahunt's building after the shot," I continued, "and traced you here. It isn't far. And now, when all these people are picked up for questioning, the interested parties come to me. Because they're interested in finding the guilty party, being innocent themselves. You didn't come to me. You are interested in saving Rolf, but certainly not in any quest for the guilty. That would lead to you."

I'd hit her now with everything I had, including the Sunday punch. I waited to see if it was enough. She was trembling violently.

I said quietly, "The police will trace the conine and the gun, eventually, or I will. I'll make it a life's work. But Rolf will probably be dead by that time."

She wavered a moment; her eyes started to close and I jumped up, reached her just as her shuddering body was tilting toward the floor.

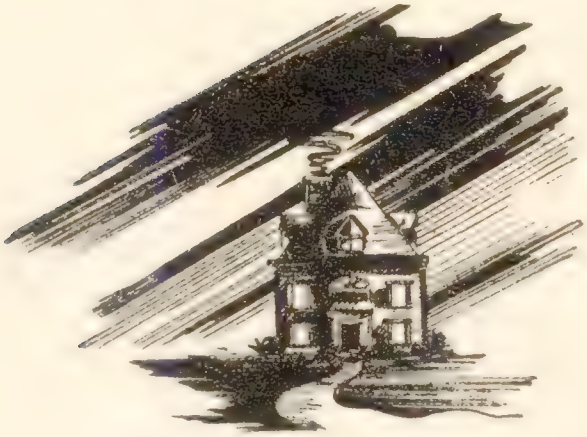
I stretched her out on the love seat and went to the door to admit Ned. I was still cold, despite the coat.

She cracked wider than the Grand Canyon, down in Detjen's special room. She named the source of the conine, too, and where she'd hidden the gun. Detjen got his picture in the papers again, but he didn't get my license as he'd promised.

Whistler is making a mint on "A Corpse in Calcutta," written by Albert Spooner, starring Norah Boone. New stars for the old.

THE END.

the glass Castle



BY PAUL TWITCHELL

It was a gracious home, its lighted windows a glowing beacon for miles around, then violence and murder struck—

CHARLEY BUGLE propped his feet upon the battered, old desk, carefully, as though he might scar its worn edges. He put both hands behind his head and interlaced his fingers. Squaring back in his chair, he glowered at the buzzing telephone.

When the ringing broke off, he jerked his hot glare across to the big, round-faced clock on the wall. It said a quarter past six.

Rays of an early sun suddenly flushed the window. It bathed him in its pinkish-glow. It revealed his long, angular face, partly hidden by a dusty felt hat. A white scar ran from his left temple to his pointed chin. His hollow eyes glowed with a hostile light.

A ray of the sun twinkled on the sheriff's badge fastened on the left side of his open vest. It blinded him momentarily, but he didn't move.

Instead, he pulled his hat down lower over his eyes.

The telephone clanged again. He jumped a little, then glared at it again, and shifted his cud of tobacco from one cheek to the other.

Let the damn thing ring, he said to himself. If Rose were trying to reach him, to apologize, she was wasting her time. After last night's quarrel, he was completely through with his young daughter. His hands were washed clean. She could go wallow in the muck with Augie Sykora.

Keys jingled up the corridor and stopped in the door. The jailer was standing there with a broomstraw between fallow lips. "Thought the phone was ringing," he drawled.

"'Twas ringing," Charley snapped.

That appeared to be a whole speech for Sheriff Charley Bugle, this morning. His feet propped against the desk was a storm signal hoisted to show the town of Two-Rivers that he was busy mulling over his troubles; that it would take almost murder to get them down. Well, maybe murder would do it, but, like his fellow citizens of Cherokee County, Charley had become hardened to violence and murder.

The jailer picked his teeth. "Lute Maligne's been raisin' hell," he stated solemnly. "We oughta let him out. We ain't got nothin' more than a drunken-drivin' charge ag'in him. He might cause trouble."

"How, Ben?" Charley spewed tobacco juice over the face of a brass cuspidor.

"Well, reckon Sykora can make a complaint through a lawyer, about us holding his man, can't he? It might come back on us at election time!"

"What kind of complaint can he put up?"

The jailer sighed. "You give him a beatin', didn't you?"

Charley started up.

"Now wait, Charley. I knowed he jerked a gun on you, and thet you wuz sore about Rose. But they's things which guys like Sykora can twist into lies at election time, ain't they?"

Charley sank back into his chair. Rose had lost most of her wildness, after his wife's death. That was five months ago. She had become interested in the household, and Charley found hopes that perhaps she would find a nice young fellow and get married. Then, this Augie Sykora and his gang of thugs had moved up from Memphis, to open a night club at the old Glass Castle, out at River's Point.

Rose was eighteen, dark, slender, and pretty as her name. In the past she had been as wild as an untamed bobcat, and had been responsible for breaking her mother's health. The recent family loss had subdued her. But Charley's hopes were completely shattered by last night's quarrel, over her seeing Sykora. She had left the house, declaring that she would never return.

"You oughta go home and git some sleep, Charley," the jailer ventured. "You been sittin' here since

midnight. Rose probably spent the night with a girl friend."

Charley scowled fiercely. "I saw her git into a car with Sykora. Lute was drivin'." He spoke with hard, hammering violence. "When I caught Lute, they wasn't with him, no more. Lute wouldn't tell where he'd taken 'em."

"Warn't they at the night club?"

"I looked there! Couldn't find 'em!"

"Shucks, Charley. I feel fer you. But what about Lute Maligne?"

"Keep him locked up," Charley said between his teeth. "Keep him in jail till he rots or tells the truth."

The jailer heaved a sigh. "O. K., Charley," he said, turning. Then froze. The outside door crashed. Feet thumped swiftly along the gloomy corridor. "Somebody's in a hurry!"

Suddenly, there materialized on the threshold, a ragged, little man, with a malignant, gnomelike face and tortuous blue eyes. He filled the room with a foul, whisky-smelling breath. Bony fingers shook as he pulled the pant leg of patched overalls. He took off his limp hat and unkempt hair sprang up like bent weeds. It was hard to guess his age. He could have been fifty, or even seventy.

"Petey Martin!" ejaculated the jailer. "Why, it's Petey Martin! And you're drunker'n coot!"

Sallow lips slavered. "Why didn't ye answer the tellyphone, ye ole buzzard!" he rasped in a half-sobbing cry. "Been tryin' ter git ye—"

He flashed his distorted eyes toward Charley. "It's Miss Rose, sheriff!" he sobbed fearfully. "She's . . . she's . . . dead! Got hit by a car!"

Charley's feet thundered on the floor boards. Desperate fires lighted his blank eyes. "What's that?" he cried harshly. "Say it ag'in! Slower this time!"

"Miss Rose is dead!" Petey's quivering cry filled the room. "Somebody hit her, on the road near the castle. I found her about twenty minutes ago. She's outside in my pickup!"

Like a man in a drugged sleep, Charley moved stiff-legged from his office to the glowing world outside. His brain kept trying to hang onto the words, just given him, by the old caretaker, from the Glass Castle; death rose up and flashed through his mind with a million impressions of death and blood.

The glow of the early sun gleamed through the tall, leafy trees, and made brilliant patterns of light over the wide, green courthouse lawn. Doves called to one another in a soft, mournful cooing from the eaves of the sprawling stone building. It was a strange contrast to violence and death.

Charley jerked to a halt beside the pickup truck. He put out a shaking hand to pluck at the edge of the dirty covering. It took every ounce of courage he could twist out of his heart and soul to lift the canvas.

He shoved it down quickly. A glimpse of a sprawled figure sick-

ened him. It was like a bloody, broken doll, with fish-white skin, and a delicate, shaped brow.

Poor, little Rose, sweet, little Rose. She hadn't had a chance. Some vicious thug had struck her down, ground her frail body into the earth. It was Charley's own flesh lying there, under the canvas; only he was alive and could feel the sharp agony coursing through his body.

His deputy, Slim Hawkins, a tall, wiry man, with thin lips and sharp eyes, came out of the courthouse. He walked up to Charley and put a hand on the sheriff's shoulder. "Take it easy, Charley," he drawled.

Abruptly, Charley brushed off the friendly hand. "I'm all right," he rasped. "You call Doc Haley. And you, Ben, take Petey and his pickup around to the morgue!"

The little man squeaked fearfully, and lurched into the truck's seat. Charley walked three steps to the front fender and looked down at the fresh dent. The right tire had a fresh cake of mud between its tread.

"How'd you get this dent in your fender?" he called sharply.

The blank eyes registered expression. "I ran into one of the fence posts behind the club," he hiccoughed. "I hadda git a canvas to cover up Miss Rose!"

"Send him right back, Ben," Charley called as the pickup rattled away. "I want to get started out to River's Point right away!"

The river road dipped into a hollow and ran up a small slope, toward River's Point, like a golden ribbon, between dusty willows. The sheriff's car sped swiftly toward the Point, with columns of dust spurting out behind it.

Sitting beside his deputy, who was driving, Charley watched the point come into view. He couldn't get his mind to focus on what he had to do. The past kept dragging itself up, and flashing pictures of a laughing Rose, in happier years. By the time they reached the Point, a few hundred yards this side of the night club, a black despair had settled over him.

Suddenly, from the back seat, Petey Martin hopped up and tapped Charley's shoulder with a bony finger. Charley's nerves coiled with startling alarm. He wheeled in his seat, snarling. "Don't do that!"

"Thar!" Petey squeaked, unabashed. He pointed at a clump of willows, off the road near the levee. "Thet's whar I found her!"

Slim Hawkins spun the car off the road and braked it to a stop. Charley got out and stared at the jumble of car tracks and footprints. Nothing could ever be made out of this, he thought. Nothing, except that Rose was running toward the river when she was struck.

He got down on hands and knees and studied the tracks, then backtracked his hot, glaring eyes toward the road. Several feet away were car tracks, then a small depression in the river mud, as though the earth had been scooped out.

He rose and walked to the soft spot. He stood over it, looking down

at it. Rse had been a wild one, but she was his flesh and blood. To believe that she was intending to commit suicide was heartsickening. Whoever killed Rose had driven off the road to do so. Yet it had happened in a heavy fog. How had the killer seen her?

He turned to his deputy. "How old would you say these tracks are?"

"Maybe eight hours," Slim Hawkins replied. He squatted and studied them more closely. "Maybe more. Why?"

"Oh, just an angle. You can take pictures now."

While his deputy got the camera from the car and snapped shots of the mud and sand, Charley was looking at the broad Ohio which flowed unhurriedly past green levees. Poor Rose. How wrong he had been at times about her. If only he had kept his temper, last night, this might not have happened.

Slim Hawkins put the camera back into the car. "O. K., Charley," he said. "Now what?"

Charley Bugle lifted his battered hat, and brushed sweat from his forehead. His brooding eyes swept up toward the great house, in a hot glance. "Let's go see Augie Sykora!" he muttered.

"Wait a minute, Charley," his deputy said, striding forward. "Let's keep our heads. You sure got a right to hang one on Sykora. But he's a smart operator, and might put you behind the eight ball if you make a slip. His car and his driver have been in our custody all night. And I'd say he could produce a dozen witnesses to prove he was at the club all night."

Charley glared at his deputy. "Rose wasn't a good girl," he said between clenched teeth, "but she was my daughter."

Charley wheeled and stalked stiffly up the knoll. The gaunt, bare house, with a slim steeple naked against the bold, blue sky, frowned upon them. The others followed Charley, a few paces behind, their feet dimly visible in the dusty sand.

The house was a monstrous, grotesque structure that was made of wood. Despite its neglected, grayish appearance, it seemed to cling to the ancient splendor of the antibellum days. Above the wide porch steps was a shiny new neon sign.

This was the Glass Castle. It was built by Captain Ephraim Glass, whose family was prominent in the early-river packet boat trade. It was known as the Glass Castle because of its great windows which caught and reflected the sunlight like mirrors. At nights, Captain Glass's family placed candles in the great windows to act as a safety beacon for the pilots of the packet boats which once sailed the broad yellow river.

The rear of this monstrous dwelling shaped itself into a low, gunbarrel type of kitchen, which faced the river. Behind this was a row of tottering sheds. These were once occupied by the slaves of the proud family. But for years these quarters had housed, inside their ravaged walls, only the drunken caretaker, Petey Martin, and his dogs.

The sheds and outhouses were enclosed by a high wire fence, where one broken post was hanging limply. Petey kicked a couple of whining coon-hounds out of their path and pointed out the post as the one he had struck during his excitement to get the canvas to cover Rose's body.

Charley and his companions were met at the door by a thickset man with beady eyes and a bashed-in nose. He put up an argument that the gambler was asleep, but Charley thrust him aside and went in to wait in the huge drawing room where roulette wheels and dice tables were encased in a green shady silence.

The only memory which Charley could draw out of the past, about this old house, was the broad staircase which circled up to a balcony. The balcony was filled with potted palms and overstuffed chairs.

A door slammed above. Footsteps sounded lightly. Charley came out of the drawing room to watch the slender gambler descend the stairs.

Augie Sykora was wearing a mauve dressing gown. He was a dark man with a tiny mustache. His eyes were like the color of midnight, which guarded any emotion he might have. He walked with a flowing, graceful motion, which reminded Charley of a copperhead snake weaving across a country road.

He halted before Charley. Neither of the men spoke. They watched one another in wary silence, with eyes half closed. They were like a fighter feeling out his opponent in the first few minutes of the battle.

The moment of uncertainty snapped. Sykora's black eyes flicked to Petey Martin. His narrow lips twitched with a faint smile. Then his well-kept hands started to play with the tassel of his belt.

His voice was heavy, resonant. "You want to ask about your daughter, sheriff?"

"Yes," said Charley in a harsh flat voice. "I want to ask about Rose."

"I haven't seen her since last night. She left here about nine o'clock."

"Rose is dead! She was struck by a car about a hundred yards from here!"

Sykora's mouth twitched with an ever-so-slight tug. "I don't believe it," he said. "Who'd want to kill Rose?"

"Don't you know?" Charley's voice sank to a hard whisper. "Don't you know, Augie?"

Those black pools of eyes suddenly veiled. "You think I did it?" Sykora asked softly. "You're a fool, Bugle! I don't deal in murder."

"She was with you last night?"

"Only for a short time. When I learned she'd run away from home, I tried sending her away. We quarreled. She left the club about nine, claiming she was through with me. I took it as kid talk. She didn't come back, so I figured she'd taken a taxi home."

Fiery hatred began to swell in

Charley's heart. "What did you fight about?" he asked. "Was it over her running away from home?"

"No," said the gambler, taking a gold case from his pocket and selecting a cigarette. "Well, all right. You might as well know. She wanted to marry me. But . . . I . . . well . . . you know—"

Suddenly, the hatred gushed out of Charley's heart. He hunched his shoulders and balled his fists, and pushed forward. But his deputy put a restraining hand on Charley's arm.

The hand steadied him. "Sykora," Charley said hoarsely, "you killed Rose. Maybe you had nothing to do with her getting hit by a car. But you drove her back to a life she was trying to forget. I'm goin' to get you, if I have to get outside the law. When I'm through, you'll either fry or get run out of the county."

When Charley arrived at the courthouse again, he found the corridor filled with a motley throng. Voices buzzed in a flat, twangy undertone, like the hidden currents of the Ohio. Tobacco smoke, drifting upward, hung in thin blue clouds above the mule bonnets and straw hats. It had a sharp, suffocating rankness which mingled with the reek of sweaty, unwashed clothes.

When he entered the door, a hush dropped instantly over the crowd. This curious, sudden silence, broken only by the loud nasal breathing of hawk-eyed bystanders, and his own footsteps, struck Charley like a hammer. It broke down barriers to his emotions, and a strange frustrated rage swept over him.

He pushed through to his office. There, reared back in Charley's chair with his feet against the desk, was Earl Sams, reporter for the *City Record*. Charley's rage boiled over. He seized the chair and jerked.

The reporter struck the floor hard. But he got up grinning. "Sorry, sheriff," he said, pulling pencil and paper from a pocket. "Didn't know you was about. Can you gimme a statement?"

Charley sank into his chair and put his feet on the desk. He locked his hands behind his head and stared coldly through the window at the swaying treetops.

When the reporter repeated his question, Charley nodded sharply at his deputy. "Ask him! He's got all the answers."

Slim Hawkins jerked a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the jail. "Go see Ben. He knows more than I do!"

"O.K.! O.K.!" snapped the reporter. "I'll do my own sleuthing." From the door he called back, "And you'll both be sorry for it!"

Charley stirred. "Git rid of that crowd, Slim!" he said stiffly. "Then take that roll of film over to the developing room. I want 'em back right away!"

"Anything else, Charley?"

"Yeah. If you see Doc Haley, tell him I'm waiting on his report."

The crowd had pushed into the courthouse yard, and now a silence had settled over the premises. Only

the ticking of the clock kept Charley alive to reality. It seemed to be saying, "Poor Rose, sweet Rose."

He put his hands over his ears to shut out the sound. But his brain kept flashing pictures of the morning's events; of the old caretaker's message, a dab of mud, and Sykora's dark, brooding face; of Rose lying bloody and broken under a piece of dirty canvas.

After a while he got up and walked back into the bullpen where the jailer was sitting reading a magazine. Without speaking, Charley reached for the ring of keys which hung on a panel-board. Then he walked to the farther end of the jail.

A stocky man lying on the cot became alive. He sat up quickly. His cat eyes glowed in the gloom. "What'd ya want?" he growled sullenly.

"The answer to my question, Maligne," Charley said very softly, looking at the bruised purple face.

"Go peddle ya papers somewhere's else, copper. My mouthpiece will do my talkin' when I git outa this rat hole."

Charley rapped impatiently. "Where'd you take Rose and Augie last night?"

"Why don't you ask my boss?" Maligne leered.

"I did. He said you took him and Rose to the club."

Maligne's jaw dropped. "Yeah?" he questioned. "Yeah, I did. Why? But what's it gonna git ya? Ya can't keep me in this rat joint ferever!"

"But I can hold you as a murder suspect!"

Springing up, the thug screamed, "What'd ya mean? Murder suspect?"

"Rose got killed by a car last night," Charley said in an even measured voice. "Near the club."

Maligne yelled gleefully, "I've got an alibi! I've been here all night!"

"Rose was killed sometime between nine and nine thirty. I arrested you at exactly nine thirty. Remember? And it was within a few yards of the place where she was struck!"

He slammed the cell door in the face of the raving thug, locked it, and strode back to his office somewhat satisfied. Maligne's admission had settled one thing. Sykora had not lied about Rose and himself going straight to the club.

Inside, he pulled up short. The caretaker, Petey Martin, was leaning over the counter, head down, shoulders shaking.

"Petey!" he barked angrily. "What's wrong with you?"

Petey straightened quickly. A hostile light flared in his blurred eyes. "Ah, sheriff," he croaked, jerking out a dirty rag and wiping his face. He reeked of whisky. "I loved Miss Rose. She usta play at my shack when she wuz a leetle shafer. 'Member the time she took keer of me when I wuz sick?"

"Sure, I remember, Petey. She thought you was the greatest guy on earth."

Petey blew his nose. "I hope ye give thet dirty buzzard the chair!"

"Who?"

"Why, Augie Sykora!" Petey sniffed. "He's purty mean ter me, sheriff. I kin sho' tell ye plenty on him—"

"What? What, Petey?"

"Sum'pon thet'll nail him fer keeps." A pink tongue licked dry lips. "I seed him an' thet Maligne leave the club in they'se car about nine last night. They'se come back at twenty past. Then Maligne high-tailed it off like he wuz drunk!"

Something snapped inside Charley. Caught by surprise, he sprang back and stared down his long nose at this drunken old fool. He was too stunned for words.

The telephone started its shrill clang again. It kept up its nerve-racking buzz until the tension which held his muscles broke. He pushed across to it.

Doc Haley's husky voice said, "You'd better sit down, Charley. I got bad news for you!"

"I can take it standing up, doc." Charley spread his feet to brace himself.

"Your theory about Rose being killed about nine thirty last night is correct, Charley."

"Yeah!"

"Yeah. And I'm going to stick my neck out for you, Charley. I'll vouch that it was deliberate murder! She was running from something when the car hit her."

Hot emotion swept through Charley. He hung up. Petey's bright little eyes were watching him with an animal-like curiosity. But Charley wasn't looking at him. Death and violence was passing through his mind. This was murder! Rose hadn't had a chance.

"I wanta go home," Petey muttered. "Kin I go home, Mister Charley?"

Charley brought his attention back to the old caretaker. "Sure, Petey. But what about your car? Didn't you say the batteries were down?"

"They'se down, all right." Petey wiped his face with the filthy rag again. "Ye'll gimme a ride home in yer car, won't ye?"

Charley's answer was interrupted by Slim Hawkins entering the room. The deputy tossed a number of photographs on the desk. "There they are, Charley. Might find something there."

Charley looked at the pictures. "Say, Slim, will you drive Petey out to the club? Batteries are down on his truck. And if you see Earl Sams about, send him in."

Charley picked up the photos and shuffled through them. They refreshed his memory of what he had looked at this morning out at River's Point. One photo was different. He laid the others aside to study it. It showed footprints leading from the road to the place where Rose's body had been found.

It was a double set of footprints. A man and woman had walked together for a short distance. Rose was with someone when she was killed. But who?

A voice said, "What you got there, sheriff?"

Charley shoved the photo into a

desk drawer and turned to see Earl Sams. "Just some pictures," Charley said, pulling a battered pipe from his vest pocket. From his hip pants pocket he produced a limp sack of tobacco. "Sit down. I want to talk with you."

"Decided to co-operate, sheriff?"

"If you want to call it co-operation." Charley lighted his pipe. A cloud of smoke hid his face. "I hear that you patronize the dice tables at Sykora's club?"

"What you driving at, sheriff?"

"Facts! Did you see my daughter at the club last night?"

"I did. She was with Augie from about eight till nine. Then she left. Shortly afterward, Augie and Lute went out, too. Augie came back alone a few minutes later. I know he was there until midnight. That was when I got away."

"I'm trying to establish the time and place of her death, Earl." Charley toyed with his pipe, then added, "I think she might have been killed on the road, instead of the levee."

"That's a new angle, ain't it? But where do I fit into the picture?"

"Did you see anything suspicious along that stretch of road when you came back to town last night?"

Earl Sams shook his head. "There might have been something, but I never saw it. Had too many drinks."

"What'd know about this Sykora?" Charley asked. "Where does he make any money running a gambling joint in Cherokee County? People here are too poor for that kind of fun."

"You shore are blind, sheriff." Earl Sams laughed as he rose. "Didn't you know the Memphis police would grab him the minute he got into that town? A state law down there don't allow his kind of gambling, so he moved across the line into Kentucky, where it ain't too far for the big suckers to follow. There's a gang of 'em up from the big city every night."

"Reckon I learn something new every day," Charley said, pushing the photos forward. "Take these with you. Could be something there for the paper."

"Thanks, sheriff." Earl Sams grinned sourly. "But I could help you more if you'd let me see the one in that drawer."

Charley shook his head. Then he swung around and cocked his feet on his desk. He was still in that position when his deputy entered the room again. He turned his head, saw something in Slim Hawkins' face which brought down his feet.

"What's wrong, Slim?" he asked.

"I just saw Doc Haley. He said to tell you that he's found that a lock of hair had been clipped from Rose's head. Thought it was done after she was killed."

Charley stared at him. Then he reached into his desk. "Take a gander at this, Slim. Do you see what I've found? Proof that Rose wasn't killed on the levee but on the road!"

"Judas priest! I see now!"

"You swear in a couple of deputies, Slim," Charley said, getting up. He crossed the floor to the gun rack

and took down a heavy revolver. "Give them guns, then meet me out in front in about twenty minutes. We're going to clean out that nest of rats and catch a murderer!"

The sheriff's car whirled swiftly along the road toward the high knoll where the windows of the Glass Castle caught the late-afternoon sunlight and threw it out over the wide river country. Charley skidded the car to a stop before the broad steps. A column of dust gushed up, then settled slowly, like golden rain.

The thickset doorman tried to bar Charley from entering, but Charley pulled his gun and forced the guard back into the great hall. He sent two of his deputies to get the other occupants, including Sykora.

Charley's wait wasn't long. Within a few minutes the natty gambler came down the stairs. He wore a dark-blue suit and a white shirt without a tie. His small feet were clad in tan-colored loafers.

He halted at the foot of the stairs. His black eyes coldly surveyed Charley, then he whipped a glance across to the deputies, who had half a dozen of his men huddled against the wall. He demanded, "What's the idea, Bugle?"

"You're under arrest, Sykora," Charley said softly. "Now get out that door!"

"What are the charges?"

"Murder!" Charley said. Suddenly, he sprang forward and grabbed the gambler. He shoved Sykora through the door before the gambler could protest. From outside, he called to Slim Hawkins, "Go get Petey Martin. I'll need him, too!"

The dimly lighted office was thronged with prisoners. Charley hardly had space enough to stride up and down as he barked questions at them. Augie Sykora was sitting at the desk. His dark face twitched. For the first time his black eyes registered expression. It was a mixed one of anxiety and hatred. He had lighted a cigarette and leaned back when Charley turned fiercely on him.

"Sykora," he bawled, "you've heard enough to know that I can hold you as a suspect. Tell your story from the time you took Rose to the night club, till you returned from that second ride."

Augie Sykora flicked ashes off his cigarette. "All right, Bugle," he snapped. "I ain't got nothing to lose. I picked up Rose about eight at the corner of Fourth and Broadway. Lute was driving. We went straight to the club. Ain't it so, Lute?

"Then Rose and me had drinks. She began quarrelin' about marryin'. But I ain't much on this marryin' business.

"I left her to look in at the dice games. When I got back she was plastered. Said she'd run off from home, and if I wasn't going to marry her, to give her the money to leave town.

"We fought some more. Then she smacked my puss and ran out of the club."

"Then what happened?"

"Lute came in to say she was fixin' to drown herself in the river. We went outside and looked around, but couldn't find her. We drove down the road a piece, but the fog was coming in so heavy we gave up. I figured she'd caught a ride back to town."

Charley's eyes glittered. "So you went back to your damn dice tables?" His voice was deadly. "You left Rose out in that fog to get killed?"

"Now, look—" The gambler started up.

Charley slapped him down. "Shut up!" he snarled. "You're lucky I don't have enough evidence to hang you. But it's going to be tough for you."

Turning swiftly, he strode across to Petey Martin. "Petey! You heard everything?"

"Sho' did," Petey hiccoughed. "An' he's lyin' faster'n a dog kin trot."

"Is he, Petey?" Charley leaned over the little man. "Suppose you tell me what you did with that lock of hair you clipped off Rose's head after she was killed?"

Sudden silence filled the room. The only sound was the ticking of the clock. With a hoarse cry, Petey flung himself toward the door. Slim Hawkins caught him around the waist and slammed him against the wall.

Petey's head cracked. He slid down into a heap of rags and began sobbing. Charley kicked him savagely. Petey uncoiled and got to his knees. In the gloomy light, his gnome face looked waspish. Tears rolled down sunken leathery cheeks.

"I didn't mean to do it!" he bawled, cupping his hands in a prayer. "I didn't mean no harm! Honest! She run into my shack. Said she wuz goin' ter drown herself. I stopped her—"

Charley whispered hoarsely, "Go on, Petey!"

"Don't hit me! Please! I'll tell. She wanted a drink. I went to the club, got a pint of likker. But I drunk it meself. She wuz gone when I got back. I cranked up the truck, drove down ta road. Musta lost my head, went ter fast in thet fog. Didn't see her till she wuz under my wheels—"

He grabbed Charley's legs, trying to hug them. Saliva ran down his chin.

Charley shook him loose. "You got scared," Charley said harshly, "so you picked up Rose and tried to walk her to the river to hide her body in the driftwood. Walking her was to make us think she was heading for the river. But you were too drunk to make it?"

"Thet's hit!" Petey howled. "I didn't mean ter harm her!"

"But you wasn't too drunk to get scared and figger a way out to git even with Sykora. You put Rose in the truck and drove back to your shack, where you purposely hit that fence post to make it look as though the accident had happened to your truck there.

"You kept Rose there till six this morning to throw us off the time

and place of death and to establish evidence against Sykora."

Petey groaned.

Charley continued, "You might have got away with it, damn you, Petey! Except for a little dab of mud on the tread of your right tire. When I saw that this morning, I knew something was wrong. You had driven off the road into the levee mud and forgot to clean your tires. The place where you skidded is still there on the levee. I have that in a picture, there in my desk. It shows your footprints when you tried to carry Rose from the road to the river bank. You also left your car here, Petey, when the batteries ran down. I checked again for certain.

"You forgot, Petey, that river mud will show time by the way it cakes."

"I don't remember," Petey moaned, beating his head against the floor.

The dim light gleamed on the blue gun barrel as Charley pulled his revolver. He spun the cylinder. "You don't have to remember, Petey!"

Slim Hawkins moved swiftly. He knocked up the gun. "Charley! Don't do that!"

Charley stared at the cringing caretaker. He pulled out a handkerchief to wipe the sweat from his eyes. "Put him in a cell," he said coldly. "Get all these mugs into the wagon. All except Augie. And you'd better stick around, Slim. I'll need you for a witness."

Sykora's face turned gray. He flung down his cigarette and jumped to his feet. A frightened glance flicked toward Slim Hawkins, who lolled in the doorway. Charley stood with his back to the gambler, against the counter.

The gambler argued, "You got the killer, Bugle. How about letting me go?"

Charley turned. A nerve twitched in his right cheek. "I got the killer, all right," he snarled, "and I got evidence that you're running a gambling syndicate. That's enough to hold you. But I'm not—"

"Thanks." Augie licked dry lips. "Thanks, sheriff."

"I told you that I'd get you—"

The gambler backed against the wall, helplessly. "You can't do anything to me, Bugle!" he uttered in a shrill voice.

"I can give you a good beating!" Charley shouted. "Then send you back to Memphis, where the police have charges against you."

His right fist slammed at the hateful face. Sykora folded. But Charley jerked him up against the wall and hammered at him. His blows were even, measured, with telling, bloody force. When he could no longer lift his arm, he dropped the gambler and staggered to his chair.

"There's a train for Memphis within fifteen minutes, Slim," he muttered wearily. "Escort him and his gang to the big town. The police will be waiting for him there."

THE END.

Homicide dicks are specialists

BY EDWARD A. DIECKMANN

Johnny Ormsman wasn't afraid when they took him to the station house. They didn't have anything on him; or that's what he thought . . .

"HELLO, Ormsman," a voice said.

I'd watched them come in. I knew they'd be over to my booth as soon as the short, fat-faced dick spotted me. His name is Isbell and he's on homicide.

"Hello," I said, and went on eating.

He sat down across the table. His partner, a tall, slim, blond guy with a gold tooth, upper right front, and a curling lip, lounged against the booth partition. I knew him, too, from that murder rap they'd tried to hang on me two years ago. I'd beaten that beef, but it was close. Damn close.

Isbell said, "We got to talk with you down at the station."

"Is this a pinch?"

The tall blonde shrugged, balled his fists. He said, "You got to go. You have a choice. Go willingly or go anyhow. You can finish your breakfast. Ain't we being nice?"

I finished my java and got a cigarette underway. Then we left. I left the morning paper on the table. It had in it about the murder of Helen

Gosse in her room in the Majestic Hotel. She'd been strangled with one of her own nylon stockings. Because I'd been playing around with her, I wasn't surprised when the two dicks spoiled my breakfast.

A guy learns a lot going through a murder trial like I did. If he's smart, a guy don't forget either, and he learns more as he goes along. That murder rap two years ago was only one of a dozen or so beefs I'd had with the law. But I'd beaten them all. Among other things, I'd learned that it wasn't a good idea to lie too much to homicide dicks. Homicide dicks are specialists and they always feel their oats. They don't hurry in murder cases. You tell lies, they check up. They prove you've lied. Then they gang up on you again with their proof and you figure you got to lie some more. Then down comes the curtain. I was going to lie about just one thing in this case; that I'd never been in Helen Gosse's room in the Majestic. I was safe there. I'd never passed through the hotel lobby. I could get to her room across the roofs from the Regal Arms, where I had an apartment. This setup was all part of the plan. Helen and I were playing a commander in the navy. We were about ready to pull the finale when—

"You knew Helen Gosse, Ormsman?" the blond dick asked as we climbed into the police car.

"I used to go around with her."

"Yeah?"

"Oh, dancing. That sort of—"

"Save the wisecracks, punk. Save 'em for Lieutenant Hyde. He loves 'em."

I couldn't resist it. "I guess he's waiting for me with baited breath," I said, and ducked just in time.

Oh, I knew I was in for it. Me beating them on the other case wouldn't make it any easier. That's the way it is with the cops. They are biased.

Isbell and the blonde, Wadby, talked with me for four hours. I timed it. I answered their questions quickly where they called for a quick reply; was serious all the way through. I didn't make up anything except that I'd never been in Helen's room. Of course, I denied that I'd killed her. I didn't let on about the navy commander at all. He'd be a suspect, anyhow. His name and ship were in the blue notebook on Helen's dresser. If I'd have brought it up that maybe he'd killed the girl, they'd have pounced on that like a ton; me trying to put the finger on him.

I advanced no alibi. Just shrugged and looked sad when Isbell mentioned one. "Hell, fellows," I told them, "I was alone last night. Dropped into Bradley's. Had a couple of beers. Took a drive out to the new drive-in theater at West Point Loma and Midway. Got back to my apartment about 1.00 a.m. When was Helen killed?"

"Never mind that, punk. Anyone see you when you got home?"

"Sure. The guy who lives in No. 21. I don't know his name. We said good night."

"And you sitting there telling us you saw no one you knew in the joints last night. Hell, you're a fixture in Bradley's. It—"

"I forgot," I said meekly. "I talked with Tex, the night bartender, about 9:00 p.m." That was true, the part about talking with Tex. But it wasn't at 9:00 p.m. At 9:00 p.m. Helen was killed. I'd heard the curfew whistle.

When I didn't, or apparently couldn't, establish an alibi, they got more friendly. I wasn't "punk" any longer. I was "Johnny" for a while, but they slapped me into a felony cell just the same. Material witness, they called it. Huh!

I lay in the bunk and went over everything that happened last night, so as to have it clear in my mind. I pictured the room, every article in it; closed my eyes and brought the layout into sharp focus, examined it thoroughly. I saw myself wiping away chance fingerprints; knew that I'd left nothing to tie me to it. I looked over the roofs, how I'd got to Helen's room from my place, across the tarpaper on the Alliance Club roof, across Knox's Five-and-Ten to Helen's window. I'd played all that carefully. Here's why:

Ten days ago, Helen and I had given out that we'd busted up. All the guys and gals around the night spots knew it. That was to give the love-sick commander a clear field. He'd fallen for Helen like a ton. A slick chick, Helen. And he was married to a gal whose old man was an admiral. That's why Helen and I played him along. I had me a nifty camera, rigged with a black-light flash gadget. When Helen gave me the office, I was to slip across the roofs and get my picture. Helen slept nude, and it was summer. It would have been a swell picture. This commander's wife would pay plenty for the picture to avoid scandal. We'd still have the negative and she'd dish out more dough for that. Get it?

That's how we'd planned it. But women! The damn fools! Helen went soft on the guy; him fat, forty-five, and kind of gray. Threw me down like a ton! That got my nanny but good. She refused to go through with our scheme at the last minute, the damn little cheater! And me expecting to use the big dough for a deal I had coming up. So I paid Helen a visit, anyhow. It took about fifteen minutes, I figured.

It was just then that the jailer keyed open the felony cell door. The fat-faced dick named Isbell came in.

"O.K., Ormsman," he growled, "snap out of it. Hyde wants you."

The room was small, had an uncovered cement floor and three pieces of furniture, a heavy table and two wooden chairs. Over the table, low down, hung a heavy green shaded light. It was not lighted. I sat down in one chair, lowering my six-foot-two into it. Hyde was across the table, an unlighted cigar jutting from one corner of his thin-lipped mouth.

He looked worn out, and I grinned inwardly at that. He was really tired and he hadn't shaved. Been working on this case since the

maid found Helen at five this morning, I supposed. He was in his shirtsleeves and he'd pulled his tie down and had unbuttoned the top button of his shirt. I saw sweat through the shirt. I nodded to him.

"Back again, eh, Ormsman?" he said around the chewed end of his cigar. "You got a good story all lined up, I guess? Eh?"

I gave him a smile I tried to make sort of wistful. "No story, lieutenant. I've nothing to hide. I want to co-operate and get to hell out of here."

He just looked at me for a space, mouthing his cigar. "Could be," he said finally. "The story you told the boys has checked, even to Tex in Bradley's. He can't say it was exactly 9:00 p.m. when you were in there, but he can't say it wasn't, either. So I guess you've told the truth." He peered at me, a slow smile appearing for a moment. He carefully placed the mutilated cigar on the table edge. "What's all this stuff about you and the dead girl, Johnny?"

"It's like I said. I played around with her. But we broke up."

"Yeah. Some guy cut you out, huh?"

"Cut me out? Hell, lieutenant, I'm not the marrying kind, if that's what you mean. I didn't have any option on the dame. Didn't want any." I shrugged.

He picked his cigar stump up and studied it. "Didn't love her just a little bit?" he asked without looking at me.

"Love her? Well, hell, there were moments, lieutenant. But she was just another girl for a while. See?"

"Didn't love her enough to kill her, eh?"

"Do I look like a loony? With all the dames just waiting to be picked up—"

He cut in on me, "By a guy who's built like a photogravure lifeguard, and with plenty sheckels, huh, Johnny?"

I didn't say anything. I thought hard. Hyde was different from last time. Then, he'd hammered at me, shooting questions, eager, hard-boiled. Now—well, he let go a deep sigh, flicking his eyes at me, turning his head away and staring at the gray wall, chewing that cigar. He looked tired out, discouraged. But, I told myself, I must not let the bars down for a minute. Too much depended on it—that little stone building in the prison yard where they tipped gas capsules into acid.

"When did you and Helen break it up, Ormsman?"

"About ten days ago."

"Seen her since, huh?"

"Sure. At Hermann's. Saw her on the street a time or two." I added, "But not to talk to."

"Ever in her room at the Majestic?"

"No. I didn't know where she was living, lieutenant. She moved from the Lennox when we split up."

He studied his chewed-up cigar. "Broke clean, eh?"

"You've called it," I replied.

He was contemplating the cigar again, twisting it between his fingers. With his other hand, he drummed

on the table. His fingernails were long. It made a hell of a noise in that little room.

"Johnny," he said, and stopped his drumming, "you've made no pretense at an alibi; you haven't tried to account for every minute of your time during the period in which I'm interested. That's to your credit, so I think." He paused as if to let that sink in.

It did. An alibi built up is pure TNT in a murder case. I knew that. They check you back and forth, up and down, 'round and 'round.

I said, "No, no alibi. I couldn't know I'd be put over the jumps, lieutenant. Maybe if I—"

"Yeah. Yeah, I know, Johnny. But you're in this picture. You was shacked up with Helen. She ditched you and took up with this commander. Possibility of a motive there. But to hell with motive. Motive always shows up when you get the right guy in a murder case, so I never worry about motive at the beginning." He sighed again, looked at his watch, and straightened in his chair. "You don't have to discuss this case with me, Johnny, you know, but, hell, you know all about that."

I nodded. "I don't mind answering questions, lieutenant," I told him. "I'd like to get this thing over and get out of here. Go right ahead."

He lifted one eyebrow in a curious sort of way, a crooked smile appearing on his thin lips. He took a sheet of typing from the table drawer and smoothed it out on the table with the edge of his hand. He studied that sheet of paper for a space, rolling the cigar around in his mouth.

"Johnny," he said, placing the sheet of paper on the desk, "believe me or not, I have no more questions." He paused and laid his cigar on the table edge. "However, he went on, "you said you wanted to co-operate. Did you mean that, Johnny?"

"Sure. I'll play along."

"O.K. Here's the setup." He tapped the sheet of paper. "I've written down a description of Helen's room, and some other things about this case, a sort of inventory of trifles, I call it. I'm going to read it over to you slowly. Then, if you still want to play along, I'll ask you to repeat as much as you can of what I've read. How about it?"

"Something like the word association test?" I asked.

He lifted both eyebrows at that. "Where'd you hear about that stunt?"

I grinned at him. "Magazines. Books."

He nodded. "Well, not exactly, Johnny. How about it?"

"Let's go," I told him. To myself I said, "Watch it, big boy. Watch it!"

He began, "The room number is 408. The numbers are in raised, fancy, brass letters. The door opens inward. There are three windows. Two face on Fifth Street, the other looks out across the roofs of the adjoining buildings. The windows

have new blue-and-white drapes; they belonged to the dead girl. Yellow shades." He went on to describe that the bed was under the third window, how her body lay on it. He read about the dresser and the things on it; how Helen's purse was open, and how there was a white gold cigarette case and lighter, with Helen's initials on them in red gold, beside the purse. I'd given them to her the day I'd played the mare, Petrified, to win at the Del Mar track and made a heavy clean-up. He read about the nylon stocking around the girl's neck, and even described the knot, a clove hitch secured with a square knot.

He paused a moment there, glancing across at me with a half smile. "You were in the navy a while, weren't you, Johnny?"

"Me and a million other guys," I told him, thinking about the commander.

He grinned and rambled on about the corridor outside Helen's room, the automatic elevator, and the fire escape. Then he tossed the sheet on the table. "That's it, Johnny. See what you can do with it."

I fished for a cigarette, got it going. He'd read me a pretty good description of Helen's room. But he'd left a few things out, added others that didn't exist. Oh, I knew what I had to do all right; keep far away from the articles he'd not mentioned; remember some of those he'd talked about but which were not in the room. I took it easy. Made a few deliberate mistakes. Skipped some items. Oh, I was careful not to be caught out on any limb. I had a clear picture of that room. Hadn't I drawn a thought picture of it an hour ago? Hell, yes! As I talked, Hyde studied the sheet of paper, making a mark now and then. When I'd wound it up, Hyde drummed on the desk. Presently, Isbell entered, carrying a complicated record player. Behind him came a swell dish of a girl in a black skirt, nice around the hips, and a white blouse with proper frills in the right places. She had dark hair and blue eyes. Nice.

Isbell placed the record player on the table. The girl adjusted a record, plugged an extension cord into a socket in the wall.

"So we made a record," I said. "Where's the mike?"

Hyde indicated the lamp shade. "Play the first record, Miss Reik. My recording." His voice came out clear. He leaned back, closed his eyes, and listened.

"Now play back Mr. Ormsman's recording. Tune it up a little. Did you ever hear your own voice, Johnny? Sounds odd as hell. You'll see."

He closed his eyes again. When the record ended he straightened up, leaned his elbows on the table, and rested his lean face in his hands. "Johnny," he said, "you came through that pretty well. You missed a lot of things, a lot of the trifles, Johnny, but your memory isn't so bad at that. You've got a keen mind all right."

"Well, I'm not exactly a dope," I told him. "But what—"

"Here's the setup, Johnny," he

cut in. "A guy innocent of a crime like murder is likely to make mistakes in a test like this. He adds, or maybe leaves out, words describing what he's heard concerning the trifles. The things he leaves out will not be significant. But you take a guilty guy. He's on his toes expecting some trick, some trap. And he's right. Cops have to be tricky. Anybody got a match?"

Isbell held a light for that horrible cigar. I had begun to hate that cigar, a chewed, mutilated thing that Hyde was about finished with. I didn't like this bit of stuff, this talk of Hyde's. Everything he said was being taken down on a record. Well, now he was grinning at me.

"Johnny," he said, "a guilty guy has all the details of his crime clear in his mind. It's the biggest thing in this world to him. He thinks about it, wondering if he's muffed anything. So, when a description of the scene is read to him and he's asked to repeat it, he can do a damn good job, if the word picture given him is accurate." He sat back, puffed at that damn cigar. All the time he was eyeing me in a speculative manner.

"What I read to you, Johnny," he continued presently, "was true enough. I added a trifle or two. You repeated them nicely. You did right well, Johnny. Right well. So well, in fact, that you were right on the beam all the way as an innocent guy would be, except for one little trifle, a tremendous trifle for you, Johnny." He laid his cigar down. I watched the smoke curl up in the still air. I heard Isbell's feet scrape on the cement; felt it when his hands grasped the back of my chair.

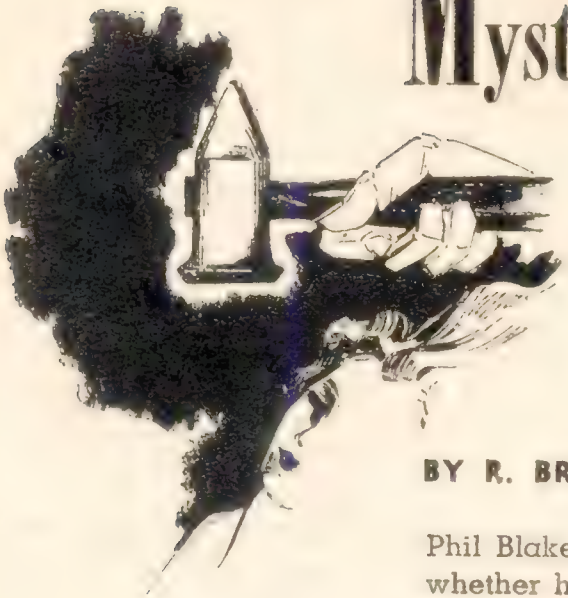
Hyde said to the girl, "Marjorie, play back Mr. Johnny Strangler Ormsman's recording, the part about the articles on the dresser."

"—blue-and-white drapes," came my voice. I hated the sound of it. "On the dresser," the voice went on, "was a purse, a gold cigarette lighter, a cigarette case, a lipstick holder, a blue leather notebook—"

Hyde reached across and shut off the machine.

"Sit down, Johnny. You got it, huh? And watch your language, punk. You listened for the trap so closely, you'd prepared yourself so well, that you told us about the one solitary thing you couldn't have known about if you were innocent, the thing that wasn't in the inventory I read to you, the thing foremost in your mind, though. The blue notebook, Johnny Ormsman. The tremendous trifle. You saw it there after you'd killed Helen, while you were searching through her purse. And you couldn't have seen it before, Johnny. You see, the commander made her a present of it the night she was killed, after he'd written his name in it. You are keen, Johnny. You have a good memory. Too good. Now let's get down to business."

THE END.



Mystery of the Deadline

BY R. BROWNOLD MILLER

Phil Blake, Blade reporter, didn't know whether his too active brain was working overtime or he had hit a real scoop.

"DEAD," I repeated, shocked horrified.

"Yes, Mr. Blake, she was dead when I examined her just after she was brought into the accident ward. I am sorry, Mr. Blake." There seemed to be genuine regret in young Dr. Matthews' voice.

Dazed, I put the French phone slowly back in its cradle. I couldn't believe it. I had talked with Jean Morton when she recovered consciousness at the scene of the accident. She hadn't appeared badly injured, just a few scratches about the face from flying glass. It had been raining. She must have applied her brakes too quickly for the car had skidded and hit a telegraph pole. Of course, the car had been pretty badly twisted up when it had smashed headlong into the pole. When she came to she had been in shock. She had thought she was all right, though, when she asked me to take her home in my car.

But I had persuaded her to let them put her in Jackson's ambulance, the one he operates in connection with his undertaking establishment, and be taken to the hospital for an examination for fear of possible serious effects that sometimes follow concussion. I was only trying to take every precaution. The worst had happened, for now she was dead. I still couldn't get it through my head.

I couldn't help thinking there was something wrong with the picture. However, people did die of concussion. I decided that the whole affair had thrown me off balance.

I had been out with her only the night before. While she was not my fiancee or anything like that, she had always been lots of fun. She had been graduated from college and could discuss most any subject interestingly. Though her father had been the richest man in town, she always seemed to enjoy my company even if I was only a reporter on the *Plainfield Blade*. I could envision now the casually curled blond hair, merry blue eyes, freckled nose and attractive, humorous mouth. She had worn a neatly tailored dark-blue suit with something frilly about the neck. And then I had to switch off the picture for it was getting me down.

I still could not reconcile the fact that she was dead with the way she had appeared after the accident. A vague suspicion began to take shape in my mind. Then I concluded that I must be having an attack of reporter's fever.

In the newspaper game, sensationalism gets into the blood. You find yourself figuring out a lascivious or criminal angle in connection with the most ordinary occurrences. You have an urge to manufacture news, for promotion depends upon scoops. Sometimes ethics goes out the window and a fellow gets so callous that he closes his eyes to the human misery that comes from exposure through publicity. Well, I hadn't been able to grow that much of a crust yet, but I was afraid that I had developed a habit of looking for dynamite wherever a situation seemed even a bit queer.

And then it hit me, the thought I had been trying to grasp. Odd that young Dr. Matthews had been losing so many of his patients lately. Old Mrs. Vincent had died about a month ago just after she reached the hospital, suffering from an attack of acute pneumonia.

Jean's father had been rushed to the hospital when he had had a heart attack and report had it that he had died shortly after he was brought in. Now Jean. All Dr. Matthews' patients. I jerked myself up shortly. Perhaps he was too inexperienced; of course, anyone can have bad luck; again, in many cases, science is helpless. My diseased brain, however, refused to be satisfied.

I lifted the phone and dialed Ed Mark's number, telling myself at the same time that I was completely insane. Ed is the most prominent insurance agent in our town. He told me that all three of the deceased were pretty well insured. But he was excited by my inquiry and wanted to know what was up. I put him off by claiming that I wanted to write a short item on recent heavy losses by the insurance company. I didn't think he was satisfied.

That night I put on a dark suit and rode out to the Morton home to offer my condolences. It was going

to be a hard thing to do, but it couldn't be avoided. Besides I had something else in mind.

The Morton residence was a twelve-room stone pile centered in approximately two acres of greensward and trees about five miles outside the city. Old Gregg, the butler, a family retainer of many years, opened the door in response to my ring. He was a tall, thin old fellow, prim in his way, but with a kindly rugged face. I could see that Jean's death had hit him hard for she had been a great favorite with him. I reached out and squeezed his arm in sympathy.

All he said was that the family, excepting Mrs. Morton who had gone to her room suffering from shock, were in the library receiving friends who had come to offer their sympathy.

Tom, Jean's brother, tall, broad-shouldered, was about half drunk. His flushed face seemed to emphasize his prominent nose, thin lips and large luminous eyes. He had a reputation of being a rounder-about-town, a heavy drinker throwing his money away in gambling places and on girls who liked to bank bills in their nylons. It was evident that he had needed some Dutch courage to face the friends of the family, but, in his way, he had always been very fond of Jean.

Lola, the brunette sister, in a chic black dress, was talking quietly to Mr. and Mrs. Evans. Evans was the manager of the First National Bank and Trust Co., the bank that handled the Morton finances.

I looked for Florence, the shy, youngest of the three girls—she was about eighteen, just out of high school—and discovered her sitting next to young Dr. Matthews. She didn't go in for glamour as Lola did, but dressed in clothes that always lacked style, pulled her hair back in a bun and wore black horn-rimmed glasses. The result was that she received very little attention at home or anywhere else. I had always felt a little sorry for her.

I went over and shook hands with Tom, said the conventional words, did the same with Lola and then manoeuvered over to where Dr. Matthews and Florence were holding forth in a desultory way. Matthews appeared to be wanting to escape and I didn't mind relieving him. He excused himself and I dropped into his chair and said, "Sorry about Jean," to Florence.

She looked at me through those horrible glasses and murmured in that half scared manner she had, "I know, Phil. You liked her a lot. And she was fond of you."

Then she looked down at her lap as if she had said too much and the wrong thing at that. As usual, I felt sorry for her, for it's terrible to be so shy and feel so neglected, as if you don't count at all.

At that moment I happened to glance up and noticed Dr. Matthews standing with his hand on the back of Lola's chair. It struck me all of a sudden in some undefined sort of way that there was something possessive and intimate about the way he looked down at her. And then a

horrible thought flashed into my consciousness. I began to be afraid of my mental reckoning. Oh, no! It just couldn't be true. I was making cables out of cobwebs.

Finally, I turned to Florence and suggested that we go for a ride, saying that all this was very hard on her and that I thought a breath of air would help. When she protested in a feeble sort of way that it might be in bad taste, I knew she wanted to get away. She finally consented after I said that I didn't think anyone would mind if we slipped out for no more than half an hour.

We rode out into the country and I could see that she was beginning to relax—she seemed to be comfortable with me—away from the others. Moonlight flooded the fields and everything stood out clearly in the silver radiance. Suddenly, I was astonished to observe what I had never realized before, that Florence's profile was excellent, marred only by those atrocious glasses, so I reached over and pulled them off.

Then I said, "Now let down your hair. It will rest you to let it blow in the wind."

She pulled out the pins and let the dark-red hair flow free.

Without the disguise, she was strikingly attractive and I told her so.

After awhile she suggested that we turn back and I did. Suddenly, I said, "Look, Florence, I know this is not the time to discuss it, but what difference will Jean's death have on your family?"

"I don't understand." She gave me a puzzled dook.

"Your father's will. There was something peculiar about it. I seem to remember hearing about it at the time he died."

"Are you trying to be the *Blade* reporter now?" she asked in a hurt tone.

"You should know better than that."

"Sorry. I'll tell you about it. Father left the estate in trust for mother during her lifetime. Mr. Smith, our attorney, called her the life tenant and said we children were the remainder—"

"Remaindermen," I supplied.

"Yes, that was it. When mother dies, the property is to be divided equally among us."

"But Jean's death?"

"Her share of the property, I suppose, will go to Tom, Lola and me on mother's death. But I don't like to think about this. Let's talk about something else."

I saw that this discussion was making her nervous, but I needed to know one other thing so I decided I'd better get it over with.

"Wasn't there something about insurance in favor of the estate?" I persisted.

"Yes. Father had all of us insured for fifty thousand dollars each in favor of the estate so that if anything happened to anyone the others would be better off. He provided in his will for payment of these premiums after his death. Father was a good businessman and was always

trying to increase the estate so that none of us would ever be in want. Father was a dear and I miss him terribly."

I was afraid she was going to break down, but I knew now what I thought it was vital for me to know.

I thought, "Father may have been a good businessman and loved his family, but he knew how to provide people with a swell motive for mass murder." And I was beginning to paint the scene with a reporter's brush again.

I switched the conversation into lighter channels, so that Florence was in more of a relaxed mood when we reached her home where she quickly resumed her disguise by pulling her hair back into a bun and donning the optical atrocities.

I didn't go in, but held her hand a minute and told her to call me if there was anything I could do. She rewarded me with a sad little smile as she turned to go into the house. But those glasses and the indifferent hair-do didn't fool me any more.

As I drove to my apartment, I was drawn back again into the orbit of my previous apprehensions. They were becoming increasingly complex. Needless to say, I didn't like any of them. If I were right, some horrible experiences lay ahead. But I did not dare neglect these spectres of suspicion. How could I proceed so that no one would learn what I thought and still prevent something ghastly from happening? I didn't know yet.

The next morning I went over to Max Jones' Auto Repair Shop. Jean's car had been taken there after the accident. I saw Max in his office huddled over his books, a bald, heavy-shouldered man. I couldn't see his thick body and too short legs, but I knew they were there.

A year back, the rotund Mr. Jones had engaged in some black market activities which it had been my fortune to give wide-spread publicity, giving me a promotion and losing me any place I might have had in Jones' affections. I carefully avoided the office and slipped around to the dimly lighted back of the shop where I took a quick look at Jean Morton's wrecked car. From what I could make of the crushed mass of metal, I might as well have stayed in my apartment and enjoyed a good hot breakfast.

As I reached in to test the brakes with my hand, Joe Lucks, the hunch-backed mechanic, surprised me by saying over my shoulder, "Crushed like a tin can under a steam roller."

I offered Joe a Camel and leaned back against the pile of metal. Joe was a good scout and might tell me what I wanted to know, if I handled him right.

"That Morton girl was a swell kid," Joe observed. "She always came to me for any job she had to have done on her car. Tipped well. Always friendly. I'll miss her. What do you want, Phil?"

"Thought there might be an angle for a story here, Joe," I answered casually. "Take a look at

this junk and see if you can see any reason why the car might have gone bad."

"That rain yesterday was enough," Joe said. "She just had her brakes on too heavy, skidded, *blotto!* I know this car. Everything was O. K., steering gear, bushings. I went over it a few days ago. Ran as easy as an electric clock and nearly as quiet."

"But you're overlooking one thing. Jean was a good driver. Be a sport and see if anything could have gone wrong."

"It'll take a little time, but I'll call you after I knock off work tonight."

I just had time to slip a five spot into Joe's hand when Max Jones came lumbering out of the office. It was evident that he had steam up for he yelled, "Get back to that truck job, Joe. Mechanics may be hard to get, but around this place we're going to get results even from a hunchie."

Joe gave me a nod, and walked away unconcerned.

As I turned away, Max let loose on me. "Keep away from here, Blake. I'm warning you. Now get out before I have you thrown out."

"I'm stronger than I look," I said with a grin. "So roll aside, egg-man, before you get cracked and lose your yolk."

But as I pulled away in my car I was not in a humorous mood. I wondered if Joe would find anything to indicate that the car might have been tampered with. However, I'd have to wait for that answer, so I reported to the office and was sent out immediately to cover a fire. It wasn't much of a blaze so I was soon free to make for a drugstore and put in a call to the hospital. I asked for Edna Belmont in the Accident Ward. I knew her slightly; a reporter gets around.

When her voice came over the wire, I asked, "How about lunch if you can get away about twelve?"

She laughed outright and said, "I don't get it. Why pick on me? Perhaps it's my beautiful teeth."

I replied that I was carried away with her personality, but how about it?

"Remember," she warned, "I don't watch my figger. I'll want cocktails, steak and all the trimmings."

"For you, honey, I'll let the expense account sag."

So I picked her up at noon and we headed for the Sign of the Turtle. Only the name was a misnomer for the waiters do not snap at the patrons nor does the proprietor have a hard shell.

We snuggled into a booth and started off on the cocktails. My companion was neither a dazzling blonde nor a luscious brunette but a woman of about fifty, hair beginning to gray, a plain face and a figure out of line, but she was tops in her work and didn't miss much. I looked over at her and grinned.

"O. K.," she laughed. "Captivated by my extraordinary beauty. Let's have it. What do you want to know

about the accident yesterday? Always the digging reporter."

"Touche," I grinned. "But your personality gnaws at me." I hesitated, hunting for the right words. "All right, tell me about Jean Morton's case."

"Well, Dr. Matthews and I were there when she was brought in, in the Accident Ward, I mean. She was barely breathing. The doctor made a quick examination and sent me out for some special items. When I got back in about a minute flat, she had ceased breathing."

We talked for some time about concussion and its effects until our food was served.

As we were smoking over second cups of coffee I said, "Strange, isn't it, that Jean and her father both died shortly after they were rushed to the hospital? Odd coincidence."

She gave me a startled look. "I hadn't thought about that. I wasn't on the other case—angina pectoris. Dr. Matthews, I understood, injected digitalis immediately on the arrival of the patient, but it was too late. As you say, it is certainly strange the way things go."

I finally took her back to the hospital and then returned to my thoughts, concerned primarily with what I had learned from our conversation.

Perhaps I had something. Matthews had been alone with Jean when he had sent the nurse out to get some supplies. Anything could have happened when Edna was out of the room. It is easy enough to help along concussion. On the other hand, digitalis was the thing to give Mr. Morton for a bad heart. I still needed to know if there was anything wrong with Jean's car before she met her accident. Joe would call me about that when he quit work.

But when he did call, he assured me that he had found nothing that would have contributed to the accident. Well, I drew a blank there. That seemed to rule out one possibility, at least. But I still wasn't satisfied.

Jean's funeral was the next day. I was one of the pall bearers. It was a mighty sad affair and I was relieved when it was all over.

That was on Wednesday and on Thursday I drove out to the Morton place and asked for Florence.

When Gregg announced me, Lola came out of the library to meet me. She was very friendly and just as glamorous as ever. When Gregg said I wanted to see Florence, she laughed and told Gregg he had made a mistake. I said that there was no mistake, that I would like to see Florence.

She gave me a mystified look. "Why do you want to see her? She's lying down upstairs and I don't want to disturb her. Won't I do?"

"Look, glamorous, why do you care? You have a fine male collection. Today, it just happens that Florence fits better into my mood."

Since it was evident that Lola didn't want to play the game that way, I scribbled a note and handed it to Gregg. "Please give this to Miss Florence, Gregg."

"Yes, Mr. Blake." He was smiling as much as a dignified butler dared.

Lola was having a hard time reconciling herself to the idea that Florence was possible competition. I was enjoying her discomfiture.

When she saw the smile on my face, she asked, "What's the conspiracy about? Come on, Phil, let me in on it."

I decided to annoy her a little more so I said, "Wouldn't you like to know?" I didn't get any response to that so we sat smoking in silence until Florence appeared. She didn't have on the glasses and her hair was plaited in a coronet around her head. Her clothes still lacked style, but there was a noticeable improvement. She came over and shook hands and hoped she hadn't taken too long.

Lola was stunned for a moment and then she said, "Where are your glasses, Florence? You'll ruin your eyes. And your hair looks terrible that way."

Her technique was so old that it creaked. I gave out like a cat and Lola got mad and left the room.

Florence and I motored out into the country where we had chicken-in-the-rough at a farmhouse where you were served all you could eat for two dollars. We spent the early afternoon boating on the lake bordering on the farm. Then I had to get back to the office.

On our way back to the city, I asked her to tell me about the heart attack that her father had had before he died. I couldn't keep away from my puzzling anxiety. Though I hated to bring up a distressing subject, there were some things I had to learn if I were ever to be able to put the pieces together. . .

She told me that her brother, Tom, had had an argument with her father over a gambling debt and that that had brought on the heart attack. Now that answer might fit into place; again I couldn't be certain.

I asked her if Dr. Matthews were a special friend of Lola's and she confirmed what I had suspected—that Matthews and Lola were considerably interested in each other.

After that we dropped the family and talked of other things. We chatted along gaily. Florence was revealing a quick knack at repartee. I began to realize that under that head of red hair there was a brain. The quick smile and bright-green eyes were awaking in me more than a brotherly interest. I began to realize what it would mean to me if anything happened to her. I was afraid in my own mind that she was right in the center of a pattern of danger. Of course, this all could be only a figment of my imagination. I felt helpless and thwarted for I could see no way by which I alone could protect her. Perhaps I could give her a veiled word of caution that wouldn't stir up too much anxiety in her mind. I decided to try it so I said, "Do you lock your bedroom door at night and leave the windows open?"

She sat up in the seat with a start; she had the wrong idea, of

course. "What a question!" And then she began to laugh until it became contagious and I couldn't help joining in.

We were both so convulsed that I had to pull up beside the road. Finally, I looked over at her and said, "If you don't stop that, I'll have to take strong-arm action."

"What's that?" she cried and began to laugh again.

So I caught her by the shoulders, leaned down and kissed her. She seemed to kiss me back and then pushed me away quickly with, "Now you won't have to climb over the roof."

I decided my attempt at warning Florence hadn't been too great a success. It didn't seem wise to press the idea any further. Maybe she would realize what I had in mind when she had time to think it over, at least enough to lock her door at night.

When we arrived back at her home, Florence's eyes were still shining and there was a glow on her face. As I helped her out of the car, she gave me an impish smile and I decided that I had to see her no later than the next evening so I proposed dinner at the Walton, a hotel managed by my aunt, where we could get a private room. I knew that Florence would not want to appear in the public dining room under the circumstances.

She hesitated a little—she was learning—and then replied teasingly, "I think it could be arranged."

My face must have shown relief, for she laughed and ran up the steps.

It was the next morning that it happened. I had started across Main Street, part of the old National Trail, where traffic cyclones passed propelled in two directions, one stream bound for Columbus and the other for Indianapolis. I reached the middle of the street when my brain lighted up like a three-hundred-watt incandescent bulb; some philosophers would call it direct perception. It rendered me immobile as a pylon. I was convinced that now I had the answer to the whole horrible puzzle. All I had needed to do was to follow the victim from the scene of the accident. It all stood out clearly. The solution checked with every bit of evidence. I was astonished that I hadn't seen it before.

Suddenly, I was brought back to consciousness of my surroundings by the blaring of horns and found that traffic was jammed up on each side of me and irate voices were describing me in lurid terms. My ancestors were taking a terrific verbal beating.

Chagrined, I made my way quickly to the sidewalk and headed for the police station. I proposed to put my discovery before Will Bascom, the chief of police, without a moment's delay. I found Bascom behind his desk, going through his morning mail. Now, Bascom was my friend and was neither a fourflusher nor a fool. That big florid face, huge body and those chunky legs were connected with a brain. He looked up with interest as I entered, and greeted me with, "Hello, Phil. What's new?"

I dropped into a chair and said, "I've got a brain storm that's bothering me, something serious if I'm right."

"O.K. Shoot," he said, giving me his complete attention. I didn't waste any words getting down to business, but told him about my anxiety over Dr. Matthews having lost three patients recently. I went over the features of Mr. Morton's will and described my dissatisfaction in accepting Jean's death as an accident. I explained how I had checked with Joe Lucks at the garage on the chance that someone might have tampered with the car before the accident and how Joe had been unable to find anything to confirm my suspicions. I told him about Mr. Morton's obsession with insurance in having all the family insured in favor of the estate, and stressed how this could prove an invitation to mass murder. I put before him all the various possible theoretical patterns that had evolved in my mind, excepting what I thought was the actual solution. I was holding that out until I got his reaction to my suspicions.

It was soon evident from Bascom's grim expression that he was taking my information and theories with deadly seriousness. Finally, he said, "Of course we may have nothing but a series of accidents, but there are too many possibilities that something unpleasant may be going on for us to dare to ignore them. We shall have to go very carefully. If your suspicions happen to be groundless, a great many people would be hurt if we allow any of our ideas to become public. Again, I don't need to tell you that we must have conclusive proof that will convince a jury."

"That is why I didn't come to you when my imagination first began to run riot." Then I proceeded to give him my final analysis of the case.

I watched Bascom's face change from interest to complete astonishment and then, I thought, to grim acceptance. Finally, he said, "You may be right. Smart piece of reasoning. Still, you could be wrong. Everything could be just the way it appears on the surface. We must find a way quickly to check your theory, for, if you are right, there are bound to be more murders. We must prevent that."

I already had my plan for apprehending the murderer worked out, so I gave it to Will Bascom in a few words. He thought for a minute before he said, "It's worth trying. But part of your plan requires illegal action. I don't want to hear of you ever being involved in anything like that. But I'll cover my end meticulously." With that, he lifted the phone and issued the necessary orders. As he gave me a permit to carry my .38, he observed, "Of course, you know that even with all possible police assistance we may not be able to prevent disaster."

I knew that our success at the crucial moment would depend on split-second timing where there could be no miss or the show would be given away, another person would be

killed. We did not dare fail. But, as I looked over at Bascom, I thought how formidable this quiet, intelligent man was when he was after a killer, like an expert poker player whom no one suspected of having a winning hand until the finish.

When I left Bascom's office, I headed for Kresge's and bought a package of chewing gum, a small can of black paint and a spool of extra heavy black thread. Then I went to the hardware store and purchased a brace and the smallest size bit used to cut through steel.

Though I now had the necessary equipment in the back of my car, I knew I could not complete my part of the plan—illegal but necessary—until late that night. I hoped it would not be too late to prevent another killing.

Toward the end of the afternoon, I was sent out to cover a daring daylight robbery at Allen's jewelry store. This cut my time so short that I had to call Florence to ask her to meet me in the lobby of the Walton, where I arrived tired and hungry at exactly seven. I looked around for Florence, but I couldn't find her. The chairs in the lobby were occupied by a venerable old priest, a small boy reading the comics, and Madame Potuli who ran a costume designing establishment and looked as if she were wearing her latest creation. Reading a magazine over by one of the potted palms was a girl in a green dinner dress. She had long auburn hair, slightly curled, that fell gracefully over her shoulders.

I dropped into a chair and centered my interest on her. I thought I might as well enjoy the scenery if Florence were going to be late. A green dinner dress I found most restful to the eyes; you know how soothing green is. There was something familiarly unfamiliar about the girl. I tried to puzzle out where I had seen her before and then she raised her head and looked at me and smiled. That was enough.

I walked over to her and said, "From thrush to bird of paradise in twenty-four hours. How did you do it?"

From a piquant start, the evening passed to a happy finale. It was ten minutes after midnight by my wrist watch when I turned out of the driveway of the Morton place. The time was about right for my nocturnal excursion.

When I had completed this job, I went home and left my car parked in front of the apartment house. I left on my clothes when I dropped on the bed. For some reason, I had a premonition that something might happen that night. I reasoned with myself that I was being silly, but I just couldn't help it.

I was dozing off when the reporter's headache, the buzzing telephone, reached my ears. For some reason a straitjacket of fear constricted me, but I let out a sigh of relief when I heard Florence's voice. Whatever was the trouble, she, at least, was all right.

"Can you get out here right away, Phil?" she urged. "Mother has had

an accident. We've just called the ambulance and—"

"I'll beat it there," I said and slammed down the phone.

I had no more than reached my car when the ambulance sped past. Jackson and his driver were leaning forward intently and the siren was going full blast. I fell in behind and watched my speedometer climb past sixty.

When we pulled up in the Morton driveway, I saw that Tom and Florence were waiting on the front steps. Florence ran toward me and I put my arm around her. "Mother fell down the stairs," she said, "and hit her head on the newel post." I could feel her tremble, but the girl had courage.

At that moment Bascom's car pulled up, skidding to a stop. I explained to him quickly what had happened. Without a word, he ran up the steps and into the house.

Jackson and his driver had Mrs. Morton in the ambulance in record time. The driver climbed into the seat as Jackson stepped into the ambulance and closed the doors behind him. I jumped onto the step and grabbed hold of the huge door handle as the vehicle moved off for the hospital at full speed.

From where I stood, I could see Jackson seated on a little pull-out seat by the stretcher where Mrs. Morton lay. As the minutes passed, I noticed Mrs. Morton moving a little. I thought probably she was regaining consciousness. I observed Jackson reach under the stretcher and bring up what looked like a folded bath towel. He placed it on Mrs. Morton's head, possibly to soak up the blood that was running down her face.

Then from under his seat he pulled out a small mallet. As he leaned over Mrs. Morton and raised it above her head, I jerked my .38 out of my shoulder holster and shot through the glass. I must have broken his right arm, for it collapsed loosely as I heard the mallet hit the floor.

He jumped to his feet, facing the door, and I read fear and desperation in his eyes as I shouted, "Don't move, Jackson, or I'll have to shoot you through the head." For a moment, I thought he was going to try throwing open the door, which would have knocked me onto the concrete highway under the wheels of the oncoming police car, but he decided to live instead.

I heard the brakes of the ambulance screech as it lumbered to a dead stop; it was all I could do to hold on. I learned later that a police car had darted out of a side road and signaled it to stop the moment my shot had been heard.

Bascom was out of his car and behind me in no time with an automatic in his hand. I slid to the right onto the bumper and jerked the door open, keeping Jackson covered all the time. But he made no resistance; he came out of the ambulance and surrendered to Bascom, who arrested him on the spot for attempted murder.

I got into the ambulance beside

Mrs. Morton and we continued our journey to the hospital. I couldn't help feeling gratified that the plan had worked so that we had been able to save Mrs. Morton's life. I smiled as I remembered Bascom's warning, and untied the black thread from the lower corner of the opaque black curtain that covered the glass top of the door. Then I broke off the thread near the hole I had bored through the side of the ambulance so the other end of the thread with the gum on it would drop down onto the road. I recalled the tense moment when I had pulled off the gum from the top of the ambulance as I stood on the step before I pulled the thread that drew the curtain aside so I could see what was going on inside the ambulance. I was still surprised that I couldn't have seen from the first that the ambulance that conveyed the patients was a possible place for murder.

Later that night, Jackson broke down and confessed to all three killings that I had thought at first might have been the work of Dr. Matthews. Jackson had been overcome by self-pity when he explained that he had had serious financial difficulties in his business—not enough deaths. Then he saw the big profits; Jean Morton's funeral alone had netted him fifteen hundred dollars.

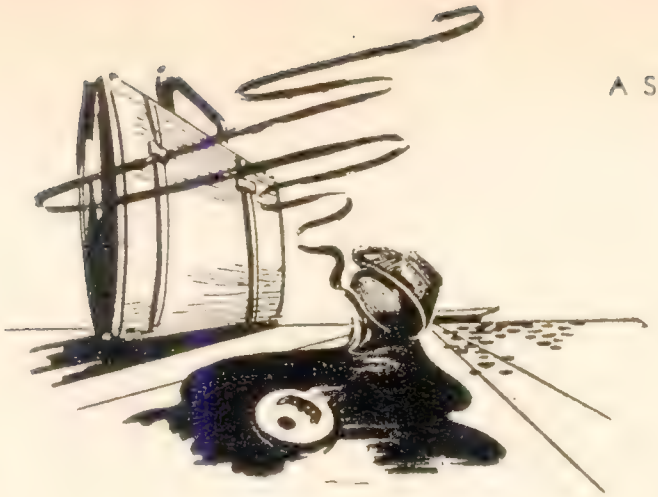
He explained that old Mrs. Vinson had been given an injection of thyroid extract that had overtaxed her heart when she was being rushed to the hospital with acute pneumonia. Mr. Morton had been treated with digitalis in the same way. This had been the right treatment for angina pectoris, but Dr. Matthews had not known that such an injection had been made, so he had given him the same dosage when he reached the hospital. The excess of digitalis was what had killed Mr. Morton, as Jackson had figured that it would. Jackson had obtained these drugs by forging the name of a doctor in a small town in another state.

The mallet, on which were found traces of dried human blood, was the explanation of the fatal concussion in the case of Jean Morton. Her mother's death would have occurred the same way if we hadn't prevented it.

Before the *Blade* hit the street with an extra that night and the town was awakened into a furore of excitement, Ray Tompkins, the editor and owner of the *Blade,* had so far forgotten himself in his enthusiasm over the scoop as to give me a substantial raise. I knew that the next day he would regret it, but that was beside the point. The sun was just rising when I got home. I undressed this time, for I meant to get my full eight hours for once. I rolled into bed and dreamed that a red-haired girl was walking down the stairs of the Morton place toward me, while somewhere near I heard the strains of Lohengrin's March reserved for such occasions.

THE END.

A SHORT NOVEL



Winged horse murder

BY JAMES BASSETT

Driving a cab was dull work, but it was safer than being a Marine on Bougainville. Or, at least, it was until Dan Hunt, ex-Marine, picked up a willowy blonde as a passenger on a cold, rainy night—

I.

COLD gray rain, lancing down from muddy night skies, changed San Francisco from a gay lady-of-pleasure into a murderous shrew locked out in the storm by a faithless lover. It coated Market Street with greasy scum. And it made driving Maroon Taxi Company's No. 789 a dangerous, tricky job. Over the Ferry Building the big clock said seven forty-five as I joined the line of cabs picking up passengers from the East Bay transcontinental terminal.

Not much fun at best, this was hacking at its worst. I wondered for the thousandth time whether it was worth the lousy forty bucks a week it added to my postwar G.I. law-school kitty. You could say only one thing for it, driving a cab was better than being a Marine on Bougainville. I had tried both. Hacking was boring as hell, but safer.

Or so I thought, as I disgustedly jammed 789 alongside the passenger-loading island under the smoke-grimed, rain-slimy archway.

Probably that's why I paid so little attention to my fare. Normally, I might have been more observant, because I have an eye for tall, willowy blondes with shoulder-length hair-dos and violet eyes. This time I just tossed her two heavy traveling bags into the meter compartment and handed her through the right-hand door.

She gave me her address in a strained, tired voice, "841 Jason Avenue."

In the back seat the girl sank into complete silence. My rear-view mirror showed her leaning against the mousy upholstery, eyes half shut, apparently in rapt concentration on the hack driver's license which the City Fathers demand we carry, framed, in plain sight of all timid passengers. I hoped she'd excuse the ill-intentioned work of the cheap-jack passport photographer who made the accompanying portrait. My face is lean, but not that cadaverous; and my nose is slightly crooked from catching a rifle butt at Marine Raider camp, but not that piratical.

Then I looked again and saw that her eyes had closed tight. Long black lashes etched shadowy tracings on her cheeks, pale, ivory cheeks.

With a resentful groan, 789 achieved the summit of Nob Hill, balking only once when it skidded on the wet cable car rails. I braked in front of 841 Jason, which was one of those towering white-and-gilt edifices that rhinestone the Hill. After carefully nudging my front wheels against the curb to keep from power diving into lower San Francisco, I crawled out.

I had to shake the girl to rouse her.

"Are we here already?" she asked drowsily.

I said we were and grabbed her elbow just in time to rescue her from collapsing on the wet sidewalk.

"I'll be all right in a moment," she said in her oddly repressed but almost musical tones. "Please help me with my bags."

So I followed her stiffly into the thick-rugged foyer and up a flight of broad stairs, fascinated by my fare's lovely legs which moved lazily just ahead of me. Nylon-clad legs that curved just right and disappeared alluringly into a forest-green wool dress.

We stopped at a door with the numerals 203 neatly outlined in shiny brass. The girl fumbled for her key, found it, and tried the lock.

But the door wouldn't open.

She turned to me, puzzled, and said, "Something's holding it shut."

I gave the door my right shoulder and it inched open a little. I set her leather luggage on the floor and really applied my one hundred and eighty pounds. It suddenly popped wide and I almost fell on my face.

But I caught myself just before sprawling over a dinner-jacketed gentleman who lay, with his arms spread-eagled, on a pale-chartreuse rug. He was quite dead. He had been stabbed between the shoulder blades

and blood had oozed down his elegant costume onto the rug itself, making a nasty congealed puddle. His slim feet, shod in patent leather, had been pressed against the door.

Right behind me the girl uttered a faint, mewing sound and began to sway. I folded her into a heart-shaped chair and rubbed her wrists. In a moment she revived, her disturbingly dark eyes widened in stark horror.

"He's . . . he's been murdered!"

I agreed in the face of the grim evidence. The girl shuddered.

"Know who he is?"

She nodded slowly. "Oland Shaw."

"Friend of yours?"

"We're both on the staff of *Pegasus*. He is . . . was an assistant editor. So am I."

I knew *Pegasus*. It's the only literary commentary magazine on the Pacific Coast worth its salt. People all over the United States buy it because it has an uncanny tendency to call the turn on a lot of things in America which need turn-calling.

Bending over the late Mr. Shaw for a closer look, I saw that he had been pierced once by some sort of stiletto which might have left only the smallest of incisions if it hadn't been withdrawn so clumsily. But the weapon was gone. The girl's apartment, consisting of a small living room, a bedroom connected by curtained French doors, a kitchenette and a pink-tiled bathroom, yielded no clue.

"Somebody," I said, "wanted to do you a bad turn, miss. Almost as bad as the turn they did Shaw. This looks like a first-class frame-up."

But the girl seemed too shocked to comprehend all this; and her peculiar lassitude was returning. Slim legs outstretched, she reclined, only half-aware of the full nature of the tragedy, in the heart-shaped chair. Just to keep busy, I stepped into the hallway to get her luggage.

At that moment I heard feet pounding up the stairs. They were heavy feet because even on the inch-thick carpeting they made the thudding sound of a cavalry troop.

Ten seconds later two granite-faced gorillas with policemen's hands and ears invaded the apartment. They wore greasy fedoras, and one of them chewed a cigar stub so traditionally cop-sized it looked almost theatrical. Both needed shaves. Cigar-stub sported a long crooked nose that extended a good inch past his mangled stogie.

He flashed a badge.

"So it is murder!" he growled.

"Yeah," agreed his partner.

They blackjacked me with simultaneous glances. Then Cigar-stub spoke again. "Somebody called headquarters. Said there'd been a killing here."

"Convenient, wasn't it?" I asked. The whole setup smelled to me.

Cigar-stub took over. "O. K., buddy. Why'd you do it?"

I boiled. "Listen, you guys, this girl and I just came from the Ferry Building. We don't know anything about it. We even had to force the door to get into the apartment."

"That," said Cigar-stub, "is a

story you'd better tell the D.A. This guy's been stabbed. You and the dame know how and why." He turned to his cohort. "Jakey, frisk them bags."

The man named Jakey, whose principal distinguishing feature was a cauliflower right ear and a scar that extended his unsmiling mouth an extra half inch to the left, obliged. He pressed the catch and the smallest bag sprang open. It contained the usual tantalizing assortment of lingerie and cosmetics.

But the second suitcase did it.

Laid carefully atop a folded print dress, wrapped in brown paper, was something the identity of which I guessed even before Cigar-stub uncovered it. In a kind of detached trance, I saw him expose the slim, cross-shaped bundle.

It was a paper cutter; one of those simulated stainless steel daggers with a flat gold handle. Engraved initials interlaced to form "I. P."

Cigar-stub turned ponderously to the girl.

"This yours?"

Her eyes never left the paper cutter. "Yes."

"What's your name?"

"Isobel Peters."

My charming inquisitor gave me a third-degree stare. "And you still say you and this dame don't know nothing about this guy's murder?"

"That's right," I said, gazing at Shaw's body. "How long has this man been dead?"

Cigar-stub grunted. "I'm not the coroner. But he looks like a three-hour stiff to me."

"Then," I said calmly, "you can't possibly tie up to this thing—"

But Cigar-stub halted me with a hand upheld like a sentry's rifle. "Nuts! You and the dame are in this up to your necks." He beckoned to his companion. "Let's take 'em along, Jakey. Headquarters will carry on from here."

I eyed him speculatively. He and Jakey stood close together, almost shoulder-to-shoulder, and they were equal in height. It was a cinch for anybody with Raider training. So I acted. I covered the five feet separating us in one jump. My outstretched arms gathered their heads together like a pair of ripe pumpkins. They made a satisfactory half-hollow sound as they collided. Both men dropped heavily, soddenly, almost drunkenly. They lay quite still.

I seized the girl by her forearm and lifted her from the chair.

"Let's go," I ordered. "Fast! Now!"

Somehow, I got her downstairs in spite of my bad knee, to my waiting cab. Directly behind the hack a big black sedan was parked, lights off, its hood steaming in the icy rain. Almost automatically I headed 789 toward my own disreputable digs on Fanshaw Street overlooking the Panhandle that leads into Golden Gate Park. My wrist watch showed nine thirty. Isobel Peters had passed out cold.

Luckily, I managed to lug her into my semi-basement two-roomer without attracting attention, because

nobody was strolling around in that deluge. But in the process both of us got thoroughly drenched.

I put her down on my sofa, hoping she wouldn't mind the springs which had an unpleasant habit of pinching you where you sat down. She was pale, scarcely breathing, and cold as ice. So I lit the gas heater and got my wool bathrobe from the closet. I shook her, thinking she'd wake up. But she didn't. Then I did the only thing possible to save her from pneumonia. I undressed her, swathed her in the robe, and put her to bed, trying unsuccessfully to be clinical and impersonal about it.

I was positive of only one thing. Neither Cigar-stub nor Jakey were real detectives. They had displayed phony, out-dated buzzers which the San Francisco police force discarded a good fifteen years ago. My law-enforcement studies told me that. Why they had appeared at Jason Avenue was more puzzling; but I figured they had been assigned, by somebody, to establish Isobel as an iron-clad murder suspect. After kidnaping her, they probably would have tipped off the law. Then I blundered into their little plot.

But other matters were less clear.

Isobel Peters' innocence was one. Conceivably, she could have committed the crime; it was unthinkable, but possible.

Meanwhile, for better or worse, she lay dead-to-the-world in my bed with enough evidence to hang her left carelessly behind in her Nob Hill apartment. Even asleep she radiated sex. She was the kind of woman around whom office jealousies might swirl. And such passions sometimes lead to sudden crimes.

At the moment, I felt the urge for a mug of strong black coffee. And a snort. So I put the percolator on, and while the pot bubbled I splashed raw bourbon into a jelly glass. I'm not much of a drinking man. But this was an emergency.

In ten minutes coffee filled the room with its heady aroma. I had arranged my guest's wet garments on a chair before the gas stove and their perfume mingled not unpleasantly with the smell of the jamoke. I was on my third cup and my sixth cigarette when I heard a soft russle at the kitchen door.

It was the girl, a trifle unsteady, but reasonably bright-eyed. She had made a remarkable recovery, I thought. On her my frayed bathrobe looked as seductive as a French negligee.

"Did you bring me here?" she asked in a low voice.

"You don't think you walked, do you?" I pushed a stool across the patched linoleum. "Have a seat, Miss Peters. And some coffee."

She sat. "I remember finding Oland Shaw's body in my apartment," she said. "And some policemen bursting in. But that's all."

I sketched recent events briefly.

"But why this?" She indicated the bathrobe. Singularly unmoved, she was neither angry nor embarrassed.

"Your clothes were soaked. It

was either that or risk pneumonia."

"Oh." She sipped her coffee meditatively as I put some more on the stove to boil. "I'm able to think clearer now. Something must have hit me hard after I got off the train at Oakland. I don't usually collapse like this." Her muted tones were apologetic. "And I'm afraid I've put you in a very bad position."

My laugh wasn't humorous. "That, Miss Peters, is a very delicate appraisal of something I'd rather call a hell of a jam."

Her dark eyebrows, startling beneath taffy-gold hair, arched upward questioningly. "'Delicate appraisal'?" she repeated. "That's funny language for a cab driver."

"I'm studying law daytimes at Berkeley."

She said, "Oh," again and poured a second cup of jamoke.

"Suppose you tell me what you know about this mess. *Everything,*" I told her.

Hesitating, she smoothed the worn wool of my bathrobe over her curved thighs, fingering the cloth almost dreamily. Then:

"A month ago I had a nervous breakdown. We work pretty hard around *Pegasus*. My boss, Hugh Bannister, was worried about me and urged that I take a month's leave-of-absence. With full pay. He even arranged for me to go to a dude ranch in Utah, and got my railroad tickets."

"Round-trip?"

"Yes. He told me to have a good rest. And he said he didn't want anybody else to know about it. We'd keep my condition secret so busybodies wouldn't make any snide remarks about *Pegasus* being edited by . . . by unstable characters who go off the deep end."

So she'd gone to the Wasatch Mountains, relaxed like a choir singer at a Sunday School picnic, and started home. On the way back, she started thinking. Bannister had written her only the most perfunctory notes during her holiday. This she viewed as not only strange, but vaguely disturbing. The closer she got to San Franscico, the more alarming the whole thing looked. A sort of panic seized her.

"I guess I had a relapse when I got off the streamliner at the Oakland ferry terminal," she said. "Jitters. Galloping ones. So I even—" Her voice dwindled.

"You even what?"

"Nothing." The violet eyes suddenly veiled. Then she went on, "I caught a ferry for the Embarcadero. Because I didn't like the dark deck for some silly reason, I went down to the snack bar where there were people. Lots of noisy people. I had a coke."

"Yes?"

"Almost immediately I began feeling woozy. Maybe . . . maybe my drink was doped."

"Brilliant deduction," I said dryly.

Apologetically, Isobel then explained that her luggage had been unlocked. A careless habit, she admitted, but she was always like that. Somebody could easily have slipped the murder knife into her suitcase on the trip across the gloomy Bay.

"Somebody," I said slowly, "who knew your movements to the dot."

"Yes." Her admission was reluctant. "I see what you mean. That Hugh Bannister planned the whole wicked thing. That *he* killed Oland Shaw and—" Coffee splashed from the cup. "Oh, no! That's impossible. Hugh was too good. Too regular. Besides—"

Isobel's vibrant voice died in her throat.

For a moment I got mad. Twice, on the verge of confessing something, she had clammed up. "Look," I said. My tongue felt dry but my brain was crystal clear now. "You and I are on a spot, Miss Peters. It couldn't be worse. There's a dead man in your apartment, stabbed with your knife. Your bags are there. And the cops will be yelping through San Francisco any minute, looking for us. Temporarily, you're safe. But I can't hide you here forever."

I lit a cigarette and exhaled a tired lungful of smoke. "Let's merge forces. Let's be honest. And above all, let's face the fact that somebody is trying very hard to pin a murder on you, for reasons maybe you can guess."

She shooked her head unhappily. "No, I can't guess. But I'm with you."

"Swell," I said. "Now let's stipulate that I'm Danny and you're Isobel. No use being Mr. and Miss when we're practically living together."

She contrived a wan smile as I added, "I'm going to visit Hugh Bannister tonight. Right now. Because we've got to get the jump on the cops. It's our only chance. If I hadn't been such a damned fool and left your gear in the apartment, you could go to the police yourself. You can't now. They wouldn't believe you in a million years. In fact," I concluded, "that's exactly what your Nemesis, whoever he is, counts on."

Isobel said that the editor lived at the Mayfair. "Here," she offered. "look."

She drew a snapshot from her handbag. I saw a tall, lean man in his forties,, with thinning hair and a face reminiscent of Abe Lincoln's. Honest. Bannister was the kind you'd trust with your kid sister or with the family jewels. So I thought.

I swept my trenchcoat off the sofa and flicked on a tiny table radio. Hawaiian music caressed the dingy room. As I started for the door I ordered, "Leave it on that station. There's news every hour. It'll keep you posted. Also, when your clothes dry, you might put 'em on. It'd be safer."

She blushed.

Rolling downhill, I turned on the cab's own radio. That was just another Maroon cab service, jive for the patrons whether they liked it or not. News came on just as 789's battered nose tilted up Nob Hill again. toward the Mayfair, which crowns that fabled peak.

It wasn't good. The police had found Shaw's body. They issued a statement almost immediately. He had been fatally stabbed with a knife belonging to Miss Isobel Peters, his

Pegasus associate. It even bore her fingerprints. Miss Peters obviously had fled the scene after taking fright at something, for her bags, packed for a long trip, had been left behind.

But the cops' announcement ignored me completely. From their viewpoint, the whole setup indicated a getaway attempt, not a return.

Instead of relief, I suddenly felt only growing worry that our masquerading enemies had failed to tie me into the mess. In fact, the more I thought of it, the less I thought of it.

With the damnable rain falling, I eased 789 into a vacant parking spot near the Mayfair and entered the ornate lobby. The imitation onyx front desk sat well back from the revolving door, so I had to limp across a couple of acres of barren parquet under the unblinking scrutiny of a stiff-collared night clerk. But by the time I broached this functionary, a wisp-haired guy with liver spots for a complexion, I had my story.

"Mr. Bannister sent for me. Wants me to run an errand. He told me to go right up."

Wisp-hair frowned importantly but swallowed the bait.

"11-7-7," he said.

I rocketed skyward in the sort of elevator cage royalty could be imprisoned in without affronting their dignity. And as I approached 1177, down a rose-lighted corridor, I got the instinctive feeling that something was haywire.

The door to the suite stood half ajar, as though somebody had made the merest pass at closing it during a very hasty departure. I entered. Elegant hunting prints in rich blacks and reds lined the walls at informal intervals; leatherbound books filled every vacant space; and the whole establishment carried out a prosperous, tweedy masculine motif. Most of the furniture was deep, comfortable stuff. An important-looking carved desk piled high with manuscripts told of a man who couldn't say good-by to work even when he left his office. But there was no sign of a living soul.

So I stepped into the bedroom. Here informality gave way to utter confusion. Every bureau drawer had been jerked open. A few shirts, apparently tossed aside by somebody packing quickly, three sober Brooks Brothers cravats and a sprinkling of broadcloth underwear lay around like fruit in a stormswept apple orchard. An open closet held several tailored suits. But there were gaps where others had been rudely withdrawn.

Everything pointed to Bannister's hurried, almost frantic, exodus. I even inspected the bathroom and found his toiletries missing. So I left, too.

Back in the lobby I assumed an injured look. "Mr. Bannister left before I arrived. I hate to get stood up, mister. Did you see him go?"

"If I had," Wisphair observed, "I would have told you so in the first place."

I departed thoughtfully.

II.

Outside, for once, the autumnal downpour had slackened and I caught sight of a few clouds scudding low over the Mayfair's brightly lighted penthouse saloon. I got back to my lowcost housing project in less than fifteen minutes. In all, I was away about an hour.

My knock didn't bring any response. Figuring that Isobel had dropped into badly needed sleep, I unlocked the door and entered as noiselessly as possible, switching on a low lamp beside the bookcase that held my legal volumes.

The room was empty. Isobel had vanished.

My bathrobe had been tossed helterskelter across the sofa. In the kitchen one of the coffee cups was washed, the other still bore coffee stains and the mark of lipstick. I heard a lowpitched humming sound. It was the radio, still glowing, its needle pointing to an empty frequency instead of the all-night disc-jockey station I'd picked earlier.

Then I started peering around carefully. Almost cautiously. I was beginning to feel damned near rattled.

But there wasn't a trace of the girl. Nothing. Isobel apparently had dressed, washed one of the cups, changed her mind about this household task for some reason, tried to shut off the radio, and departed.

Or, I found myself thinking somberly, had she?

Puzzled and more concerned than I liked to admit, even to myself, I picked up the bathrobe and walked slowly to the bathroom to hang it on a hook. As I did so, the bald glare from the naked incandescent over the washbowl glinted sickly off something on the garment. Something written in lipstick. It was a single three-letter word, scrawled hastily but legibly just below the collar. It said: "Key."

That's all. Nothing else. Just that idiotic, cryptic word: "Key."

Then I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, although the abrupt truth was more shocking than my previous suspicion, that Isobel had been kidnaped. Key was the only clue she had been able to leave. But—and all my anguished cogitating ended in blind alleys—key to what?

I didn't delude myself now. Somewhere the Unknown knew all about me. His agents had followed me home, waiting for me to leave before striking at Isobel. Next time it would be me. I knew too much to remain happily at large. Thinking of Isobel just then, I got a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach.

It was two a.m. Heavy-headed from lack of sleep, I limped out to 789 and crawled in, then drove to the uptown Maroon garage and told O'Brien, the night super, that I wasn't feeling so hot. Back home I allotted myself five hours of drugged sleep.

My alarm clock seemed to ring almost before my burning eyes closed. After a rugged breakfast, washed down by my special eye-opener coffee, I rinsed off the dishes, sentimentally leaving Isobel's un-

touched cup on the shelf over the drainboard.

It was my talisman.

After that I caught a streetcar for the *Pegasus* office. My plan was absurdly simple. I'd apply for work there, and see what developed. The magazine was published at 91 Alastair Avenue, on the third floor of a tumbling brownstone building that miraculously had survived the big quake of 1906. I hobbled into the rickety elevator.

Outside the antique door, which had a winged horse badly painted in red on its frosted glass panel, I paused to consider my approach. Absent-mindedly, I scanned a small framed legend as I reached for the knob:

"*Pegasus,*" it read, "respects Truth, challenges Evil, searches out Deception, welcomes Originality, and fears no Man."

An angular dame, wearing bulky spectacles that clamped to the sides of her head like horse-blinders, commanded the reception desk. Fortyish, she had lank, straight black hair. She speared me with a dark gaze.

"I'm Daniel Hunt," I said. "And I want a job."

My direct approach jarred her slightly. But she confined her surprise to a monosyllable. "Why?"

"Because I despise Evil and Deception," I said. "Also, I think I can offer *Pegasus* some Originality. Plus which I love Truth."

Her eyes smoldered behind their thick-framed cheaters. "I see you can read, anyhow, Mr. Hunt. Both our little motto outside and the morning newspapers. You probably gathered from the press that we've had shall we say 'personnel trouble' here. So I should add Opportunist to your other characteristics," she finished dryly.

I asked, "Do you also write editorials?"

Without springing even a half smile, she told me to wait. Then she cantered through another dingy brown door marked "Private." After an excessively long time, she reappeared.

"Mr. Larrabee will see you." She seemed astonished by this fact.

I knew all about Lawrence Larbee; you couldn't live in San Francisco without hearing his name. He was, officially, publisher of *Pegasus.* But that was only a sideline. *Who's Who* listed him variously as a shipping tycoon; director in steel companies, mines and export lines; a philanthropist whose interests stretched from his own city's slums to the starving Greeks; and a former United States senator during a two-year appointive term.

Physically, Larrabee at sixty-two belied this impressive record. Instead of being king-sized, he was almost a dwarf. Whereas he should have had a mane of wavy white hair, he was bald. He also had a huge nose, bulgy blue eyes, and a protruberant forehead. Maybe that bespoke his massive brain. Following the prevailing trend, Larrabee wore pale-ember horse-blinder spectacles.

Without rising, he offered me a stuffed leather chair, and shoved a mahogany humidor across the im-

maculate editorial desk. I lit a fat Corona Corona, letting him speak first.

"Mr. Hunt," he piped in a shrill voice, "I understand you desire a position with us." I nodded. "Miss Tanney informs me you have acquired at least a speaking acquaintance with *Pegasus'* ideals. She says you quoted them to her."

"I guess I misquoted them. I was trying to be funny. Maybe that was wrong."

Larrabee's incredible forehead creased. "No, Mr. Hunt, we do not care for levity here. Rational humor, yes. The quietly amused philosophy of men of Good Will, yes. But flippancy, no."

He had a trick way of indicating capital letters even when he talked, so I guessed he had authored the motto outside the front door.

I almost said, "Check!" But I hastily substituted, "Yes, sir."

It took me two minutes to reel off my nonexistent qualifications for a job, after which Larrabee pushed back his chair with the attitude of a man used to sudden decisions. He trotted around to me, smiling and showing a mouthful of large gold teeth, and reached for my hand, which he pumped briskly. His cranium just reached my chin. Tiny globules of sweat glistened on his obscenely naked head. He was a hard man to like, personally, that is.

"I think we can use you, Mr. Hunt. At least, we shall give you a probationary job. As copy-assistant."

Larrabee escorted me around *Pegasus'* cluttered rooms, performing introductions like a foster father presenting a newly-adopted son. I met Spencer Todd, the senior surviving editor. He didn't seem overly pleased about me, so his handclasp was perfunctory.

In fact, it suddenly dawned on me, nobody was exactly overjoyed at my joining their happy little family.

Except Larrabee himself. He led me back into his office where we both sat down again and concentrated on his excellent Havanas. Finally, he mentioned things I wanted to hear most.

"I think," he said, "we should be frank, Mr. Hunt, about certain recent regrettable occurrences. Our watchword is Truth. Nothing is gained by hiding Facts."

"Right," I concurred.

"Naturally, I am gravely distressed," he went on in his formal, piping way. "Even grieved, although I have always believed that Man's troubles usually arise from his own Wrongdoing. But Bannister surprised me. He had always been a level-headed worker, serious, earnest, loyal. And," Larrabee finished, "thoroughly Reliable."

I clucked sympathetically.

"So I am most astonished that he became involved in these Horrible Events. But I cannot but feel that he plays a prominent role in them. As for Oland Shaw— He, I regret to say, was a Weakling. We retained him largely because of his family. Lovely wife. Four charming children," Larrabee ruminated sad-

ly. Then "Isobel Peters' connection with the case is shocking. She was one of our Stalwarts."

"Was she jealous of her bosses?" I asked.

Larrabee seemed nettled by my earthy question. "We do not tolerate jealousy on *Pegasus*. But it is possible that Miss Peters became mentally unbalanced. Hard work. Nervous exhaustion. One's mind plays strange and terrible tricks at such times."

"You mean," I pursued, "that Miss Peters threw a sudden fit of homicidal insanity?"

His high voice was sad. "Very likely."

"Then Bannister must have been at least an accessory."

"Too, too true," the fabulous gnome agreed somberly.

But the interview ended before I could decide whether to deal Larrabee a cold hand, laying my own predicament and fears for Isobel on the table for his scrutiny. Outside, a murmur of undercover conversation stilled abruptly as I entered the editorial rooms. Even the horsey Miss Tanney had joined the merry throng.

Todd took me in hand, however, and soon I was reading back issues of *Pegasus* to learn the magazine's policy and style. It wasn't as easy as it sounds. My chair was hard and straight, so were the articles, and my brain was turning handsprings.

Pegasus' dusty back numbers didn't elicit much. Once I thought I had something when I found the first of three yarns entitled "Let the People Know," by a guy named Harrison Bates. It dealt with war contracts in language about as subtle as a punch in the jaw. If the other two pursued this line, a lot of contractors and their pals would get badly mauled.

But the next issue dropped the series. A curt announcement said merely: "Circumstances beyond our control have forced us to discontinue these articles by Mr. Harrison Bates."

Perhaps, I reflected, Bannister had caught a sudden case of cold feet. Or maybe somebody had got to him. With, say, a convincing argument in the shape of a few thousand well-chosen dollars. I glanced at the dateline. It was the September issue. One short month ago.

You generally get your best information accidentally. So I wasn't surprised to learn, loitering around the water fountain, that Bannister's secretary hadn't come to work that morning. Her name was Janice Howe and she lived at 823 Sandifer Lane, in the semi-Bohemian end of town that festoons Russian Hill. Everybody figured she'd seen the newspapers and promptly thrown a wingding. That's how she was, arty and emotional.

I also discovered that Larrabee hadn't wasted any time engaging a new chief editor. He reached out by wire to Manhattan to summon a fellow named McKelvey Ransome, whom he had known during the war years when both did welfare work together. But nobody around *Pe-*

gasus seemed acquainted with the new boss.

This explained Todd's own brusqueness. I guess he was damned disappointed that he hadn't been chosen head man by a process of elimination.

At five o'clock the crew knocked off. As I left a little behind the others, the musty corridor already had begun to grow dim. I enticed the elevator to the third floor and descended under the unflagging stare of the night watchman who also operated this decrepit lift. In a moment of inspiration, I pressed a couple of silver dollars into his gnarled fist. His face lit up under a week-old blanket of beard-grizzle.

"I'm a new man here," I told him. "They said I'd have to work nights occasionally. These'll pay in advance for any trouble I might cause at odd hours."

"Thanks, mister." He nodded. "Any time, any time at all. Just holler."

I crossed the street to a saloon to telephone the Maroon shop. When the night super came on, I said, "This is Hunt. I know it's damned short notice, O'Brien, but I can't work tonight. In fact, I may even have to quit—"

"Too bad, Danny boy." The Irishman sighed. "Maybe it's all for the best. You see, you wouldn't have a hack tonight, anyhow. Old 789's been wrecked."

"Yeah?"

"Worse'n that. The driver was wrecked, too."

"Manny Bruskin?" 789's tandem night-day team was Danny and Manny.

"The same. Late this afternoon two thugs in a big black sedan jammed the lad into a curb on Twin Peaks. He tried to avoid a collision and did. But he ran 789 off the highway. The hack fell about fifty feet. Manny's in Samaritan Hospital with a busted back and concussion. Maybe he'll never walk again."

"Good God!"

"Nobody knows why they picked on Manny," O'Brien went on. "He's a good kid. And this divvilish thing was deliberate as a lynchin'."

We swapped a few more commiserations before hanging up. I grabbed a cab and told the driver to take me to 823 Sandifer Lane. I had no illusions now. The thugs were thorough. Knowing my old hack, they probably had followed it most of the day, till it reached the dangerous, lonely heights west of the city before they struck. Poor Manny was as unlucky as I, for the brief moment, was lucky.

Bannister's Girl Friday occupied a walk-up flat with big windows that looked out obliquely over a corner of San Francisco Bay. The dying sun, milky in a gathering fog, touched their panes weakly. I thought I saw drapes flicker as the cab's brakes squealed. I told the cab to wait.

Janice Howe answered my knock. But she kept the door on its six-inch latch-chain so all I could see was a tumbling mass of auburn hair and a pair of chestnut eyes that would have been magnificent if they

hadn't been red from much weeping. She was one of those pale, alabaster-skinned women who used to send Greek poets into ecstasies. And she was very tall.

But to me at that moment she was just a hysterical dame who might have information I badly needed.

"I'm Danny Hunt," I said. "I was hired by *Pegasus* today and I thought I'd drop out to see you."

"Why?"

"Because I'm anxious to make good on the magazine." I ignored her inhospitality. "They told me you knew more about its operations than anybody, except maybe your boss, Hugh Bannister."

"I see." Miss Howe's red-rimmed eyes narrowed and she seemed only half-convinced. "This is rather odd. Even irregular, Mr. Hunt. But you may come in a moment."

Her apartment consisted mainly of one low-ceilinged salon big enough for an Oriental fancy-dress ball. Apparently, she had decorated it with something like that in mind.

I dropped onto a covered daybed, the kind Hawaiians call a *punee,* and massaged my lame knee.

Miss Howe glided across the room to a straight-back raffia chair a good twelve feet from me, where she sat primly, her ankles crossed in formal fashion. She wore an out-of-character tailored suit and flat-heeled shoes with fringed tongues, a type of female brogan that vanished in the '29 crash.

I tabbed Janice Howe as a romantic, not too young, not too old, who had, somehow, fallen for the exotic life. If she hadn't embarked on a secretarial career at *Pegasus,* she might have wound up as a schoolteacher. Thwarted. With a penchant for long jade earrings.

She glanced significantly at the door, which remained well ajar, so I skipped the preliminaries.

"Maybe you should call me sort of unofficial committee-of-one to look around a bit," I said. "Besides, I knew Isobel Peters before I joined the staff." Technically, that was a fact; it made me sound reliable.

No comment.

"Frankly, Miss Howe, we feel that Bannister's disappearance adds up to just one thing, complicity with Isobel in Shaw's murder."

The young-old girl came to life. She flared, "Mr. Hunt, I think you are most impertinent, coming to my home in this manner. I don't see why I should talk to you at all." Then the fire subsided as suddenly as it had raged and she added illogically, "But I shall. Briefly."

"Thanks."

"I have been trying to think of some explanation for this dreadful tragedy," she said in an oddly repressed voice. "It defies explanation. I've worked for Mr. Bannister since 1936. He hadn't an evil thought in him. But recently—" Her words trailed off. She looked nervously toward the open door, as if she expected unwelcome guests.

"Yes?" I prodded gently.

"Recently, Mr. Bannister had been worried about something. That wasn't like him. Usually, he took

his duties in stride. Then he went off on several trips. Short ones. But each time he returned more concerned than ever." Miss Howe grimaced pathetically. "It began to affect me. I was in such a state when all this...this trouble broke, that I collapsed."

"Well," I observed, "while you were collapsing, quite a lot happened. Bannister ducked out. So did Isobel."

"I know," she almost whispered. "I can't understand that. I'm positive Isobel couldn't have had any connection with Oland Shaw's murder. And yet—"

"Yet what?"

"How else could it have happened?"

"You might as well have the facts," I snapped. "I have a personal reason for wanting to find Isobel Peters." I let her have it between the lovely eyes. "I think she's been kidnaped!"

Janice Howe stifled a tiny scream.

I went on, "What was bothering Bannister these last few weeks?"

"He had learned—" She stopped short, half-turning in her chair, stark fear on her pale face.

My gaze paralleled hers to the open door. A man stood there. He was short, swarthy and Latin, handsome in a forbidding way, with incredibly broad shoulders made even wider by a padded gray flannel coat.

"Ramon," she breathed.

"Yes, 'Ramon'," the man repeated. "Maybe I should go away now. You have company."

I didn't like Ramon's tone or his look. "I'm associated with Miss Howe on *Pegasus*. We missed her today. I thought she'd like to know what happened at the office."

Ramon's eyebrows lifted slightly. "You are on *Pegasus?* That is strange—"

But the girl, collecting herself with a visible effort, interrupted, "Mr. Hunt, Mr. Monelli. My fiance."

I was caught with my incredulity showing. But Ramon masked his own earlier venom and thrust out his right hand. The palm was soft and scented. He wore two rings, a diamond on his little finger and a gold intaglio on his middle finger. He was decked out like a pretty boy; but that was only skin deep. Monelli reeked of deadly danger.

His engagement to Janice Howe had all the appropriateness of a cobra's mating with a nightingale.

As I said "good night" and limped down to the cab, the man's dark stare followed me. I had the distinctly uneasy feeling that Ramon took a more-than-academic interest in my presence at her apartment.

"Samaritan Hospital," I told the driver.

The nurse there gave me ten minutes with Manny, who related his story through lips twisted with pain in spite of the stuff they'd shot into him. His assailants unquestionably had been Cigar-stub and Jakey.

"You know," he mused bitterly, "I think I've seen them guys before."

"Try to remember, Manny. Where?"

"Only place it could be, Danny, is the shipyard where I worked during the war. Amalgamated." He uttered a weak cry. "Yeah, that's it. They were in the plant protection force. Company cops." He frowned. "But why did they go after me? I never did nothing to them—"

"They wanted me, Manny."

III.

My hack dropped me at Market and Powell. In a chain beanery I ordered ham-and-eggs, and caught up on my newspaper reading.

Apparently, the law was finding tough sledding in the "Winged Horse Murder," as the *Clarion's* literary rewrite man called the killing. Guessing that Isobel and Bannister had fled together, they'd spread the inevitable police dragnet across every highway and railway out of San Francisco. The *Clarion* licked journalistic chops over this lover-accomplice theme which it dished up with a drawing by an artist who should have been decorating gents' rooms.

An interview with Oland Shaw's widow disclosed the rather odd fact that the assistant editor had planned to quit *Pegasus* that very week over a row with the management.

Finished with my supper, I caught a streetcar back to 91 Alastair. All its windows were dark. So I buttonholed the watchman. Grizzlepuss cheerfully took me upstairs and unlocked the magazine office.

"No rest for the wicked," I grinned at him.

"Ain't it hell on the workin' classes?" he agreed.

Research into *Pegasus'* bulky files promised a full night's work. Carefully lowering the shades, I turned on a single light farthest from the windows, carried the "L" drawer to a table and dived into the mess. Most of Larrabee's memoranda dealt with paper costs, payrolls and suchlike dull stuff. None even hinted of my one, forlorn clue: key.

Then I came to a missive dated August eleventh.

"McKelvey Ransome indubitably is a man to watch," it read. "He is a Comer. He sees Facts in their true perspective. Recently, he has done a series on Postwar Reconversion, with emphasis on major defense plants. His analysis of Amalgamated Shipbuilding's splendid record is especially Noteworthy.

"Besides," the memo added, "I gained personal knowledge of Mr. Ransome's abilities during the War. I believe his articles should be most prominently displayed in view of the Current Hullaballoo against certain manufacturers whose contribution to our Glorious Victory has been much maligned."

To all this Bannister had red-penciled a single comment:

"Smells fishy to me!"

But I found no trace of the stories themselves; nor of the two unpublished Harrison Bates yarns which, obviously, would have taken a violently different stand from the Ransome pieces. But why had both series been sidetracked? Surely Larrabee's word was law on *Pegasus*.

Even Bannister wouldn't lightly have ignored that word. Or would he?

At least his scrawled "Smells fishy to me!" seemed to absolve him from selling out to Amalgamated.

But Larrabee's interest in the Ransome opus was hard to explain. His community reputation was spotless. Too spotless, in fact, to permit any suspicion that he was involved in shady war-contract doings.

I had been so deeply engrossed that I failed to hear the door open, or the stealthy footfalls on the cluttered floor. Suddenly, I sensed somebody behind me. As I turned, something smashed against the base of my skull.

I must have been unconscious a long time. When I regained my aching senses, I reeked of chloroform. And I no longer was in the *Pegasus* office. My coat, rolled into a wad under my head, served as a pillow, beneath me was a bare army cot. Cautiously, I peered around the small room, almost thankful for the dimness which felt easy on my bursting eyeballs. It was a dingy place. The walls were clapboard, hastily assembled, and a patched tarpaper roof displayed gaps through which stars glimmered microscopically.

Below me I heard the sound of lapping waters. Then the foul, unmistakable stench of rotting fish assailed my nostrils.

I rose on my elbow.

A vaguely familiar voice came from a far corner of the room. It was a tough, sneering voice. I turned painfully and saw, more shadowed then illumined by the flickering kerosene lamp, the hawk-nosed face of Cigar-stub. He was chewing his inevitable stogie.

"Keep your seat, buddy," he warned.

I gave him a weary look. "You're haunting me." I gingerly massaged my bruised skull. "Just thinking about it gives me a headache."

"Funnyman, huh?"

"Not very."

Then I noticed that Jakey sat behind the lamp, aiming a wicked-looking automatic at my belt buckle.

"I'm not going anywhere," I reassured him. "This is my favorite shanty. Besides, I'm sick."

"You'll feel sicker," Cigar-stub said, "if you even move a muscle. Some people want to talk to you. And they'd be awful unhappy if you turned up missing. Unless we had your corpse as a receipt, that is."

I subsided.

After about fifteen minutes, during which I concentrated on sweeping cobwebs out of my brain, the shack door opened. When the newcomer reached the zone of feeble light, I saw Monelli, still in his elegant gray flannels, still scowling.

"You and I," he said, "seem to meet pretty regular."

"The pleasure's all yours."

His scowl deepened. In the uncertain glow, his pupils contracted to ebony pinpoints. "Wise guy, huh?"

"What do you want?" I asked. "Now that I've accepted your invitation, you might at least tell me what the party's all about."

"You know too much already,"

Monelli said heavily. "It's not healthy for you or us."

When I just looked expectant, he continued, "You might have had a chance, Hunt, if you'd kept your nose out of other people's business. But you insisted. You horned in."

"You mean that giving Isobel Peters a helping hand was horning in? Anybody would have done as much—"

"Yes," he interrupted, "and anybody would have gotten burned for it. Just like you're going to get burned."

"Did Bannister get burned, too?"

Monelli grinned evilly. "He started this whole thing. Everybody was happy till Bannister went into his fearless editor act. Poking into matters that didn't concern him."

"Like Amalgamated Shipbuilding?"

Monelli snapped, "I'm not saying anything, mister." He turned to Cigar-stub. "Bring our little pal outside."

They prodded me roughly to the door which opened onto a rickety pier set a few yards above the surging waves of San Francicso Bay. Far off to my right I saw the city's lights glowing uncertainly through translucent fog. A flat-bottomed rowboat bobbed against the piling, and two sweatered hoodlums were lowering a canvas-jacketed Something into it. Monelli stopped them.

"Look," he commanded.

He peeled the tarpaulin off the upper half of the inert bundle, uncovering a man's face, bruised, blackened, and very dead. Despite his horrible beating, the man's Lincolnesque features were relatively intact. It was Bannister.

For the first time I saw the cement blocks lashed to the corpse's shrouded feet. Suddenly sick, I muttered, "Pretty thorough, aren't you, Monelli? Just like the old Chicago days, the snatch and the rub-out."

The man ignored my remarks. Then he said something that cut me like a sabre.

"Think it over, buddy. We've got your girl friend, too."

Cigar-stub and Jakey hauled me back into the shack. They threw me onto the cot and began to truss me with quarter-inch hemp. And for the second time since my first meeting with this unlovely couple, I profited from a Marine-taught lesson. As they whipped the ropes around me, I expanded my chest and flexed my muscles. Hard. It gave me leeway, almost imperceptible, but, nevertheless, satisfying, inside my bonds.

"Sleep tight," Cigar-stub said. "That," he concluded heavily, "was a pun. Laugh!" He slapped my jaw with his bare hand. I laughed.

Jakey patted his automatic as he left, giving me an appraising glance. He seemed to be measuring me for a nice suit of bullet holes. Cigar-stub said they'd be around, close.

So I played possum for about a half hour to give them plenty of time to go about their nasty little personal affairs. I tried to figure out why they hadn't disposed of me immediately, along with Bannister. There must be a reason, a powerful one. Such as, it suddenly occurred

to me, their hopes that I'd spill information they wanted pretty badly.

But what information?

I had a flash of genius. Obviously, Bannister's suite had been searched last night. And his murderers had been seeking something tangible, like the missing Harrison Bates articles. They must be fearfully valuable to somebody. Worth two murders. Maybe a third.

Working my bonds loose was tedious business. But in twenty minutes I was free.

I slid gently from the cot and stood erect, feeling more alone than ever before in my whole orphaned life. As I tiptoed toward the door, cursing the boards that creaked under my feet, I tripped on something, hurting my gimp knee.

I stopped.

It was a loose timber that moved perceptibly when I wrenched at it. I knew it was rotten. So I gave it a heave and it came away in my hands, almost upsetting me in the semi-darkness. Quickly, I pried up three more. Through the gap in the ragged flooring I could see the roiling flash of the Bay.

I eased myself into the water, holding to a floor joist until my feet dangled toward the surface, and dropped the final distance as quietly as I could. It was ice cold. But nobody shouted as I paddled slowly toward the beach; nobody yelled as I crawled out of the frigid Bay; and nobody called as I skirted a small house near the pier ramp. I could see Cigar-stub and Jakey intent over a whisky bottle. I'd have given my good leg for a drink just then.

The main highway from San Francisco to the redwood country ribboned north-south less than a half mile from the Bay. I reached it, shivering miserably in my drenched clothes, and stepped cautiously across the six-lane pavement. I'd gone about a mile before a milk truck drew alongside and a freckle-faced farmer boy stuck his head out the cab window to offer a lift. I climbed in. The heat from the engine felt good.

The kid didn't ask any questions as we settled down to the fifteen-mile jaunt to the city. I dozed.

When my benefactor stopped for a downtown signal before heading toward the produce center, I thanked him and swung off the truck. It was almost 3:00 a.m. Even Market Street was pretty barren, except for a handful of beat-pounding cops at sparse intervals, a few wobbly drunks, some sailors with no place to go, and a pair of raddled chippies hunting a little pre-dawn trade.

Despite the odd hour, I resolved to pay Janice Howe a social call rather than return to my own apartment, which, undoubtedly, would be shadowed. Maybe, I thought, that'd warm me up. Maybe I'd also find some answers.

Two blocks away I located a cab and got in, suddenly conscious that my left knee had stiffened almost past the bending point. It hurt like hell. Naturally, 823 Sandifer Lane was dark. But I hobbled up the stairs and rang the doorbell long

and hard, feeling no compunction. Her voice quavered with fear as it responded:

"Who's there?"

"Danny Hunt." My words carried a flat don't-stall-me note.

"Go away. It's . . . it's after three!"

"Miss Howe, you'd better let me in. There's been hell to pay tonight and I think you know a lot more about it than you told me earlier." I gave the panel a belt. "Either you let me in or I'll bust down the door."

She surrendered.

As she closed the door carefully, locked it, and faced me, I caught my breath at the sight of all that ivory and auburn beauty so imperfectly shielded by a pale-blue negligee. For once she seemed in harmony with her exotic surroundings. I turned to business with an effort.

"Let's stop kidding ourselves, Miss Howe. Bannister's been murdered. I saw his body two hours ago. And your charming fiancé did the dirty work." Janice cowered on the daybed, speechless. "Monelli also kidnaped Isobel Peters. If she's been hurt, Heaven help him!" My fists clenched so hard my nails bit into my palms. "Only a miracle saved me tonight!"

"Oh," the girl breathed, "this is horrible."

I continued remorselessly, "I don't know what hold Monelli has over you, little lady. But whatever it is, it's no good. He's rotten. Poison!"

Janice nodded miserably.

For a brief second, I was almost surprised at her passive agreement. Such a woman wouldn't, I thought, get over the disease of loving Ramon Monelli quite that fast, unless the fever had already started to break. Then I noticed that her face was bruised. Heavy marks, poorly hidden by a thick layer of powder, were visible in the shaded glow of a table lamp. Her wrists, too, showed angry welts.

"Ramon did it," she said dully.

"After I left?"

"Yes."

I asked abruptly, "What does he do for a living besides beating up women and murdering their bosses?"

"He runs a private protection agency," she said. "He has several clients."

"Who?"

"One's a shipyard."

"Amalgamated?"

Her eyes widened. "How did you know?"

"I'm psychic. When Isobel left town on her rest cure, who knew where she was going and why?"

"Only Mr. Bannister and I."

"Then you told Monelli?"

"Yes." This was almost a sob.

"Why?"

"Because he said he was supposed to guard *Pegasus* people in special cases. He said it was a new contract for him."

I looked at Janice Howe. She was a picture of utter, broken defeat. Somehow, I realized, she had succumbed completely to the ruthelss bum through some weird twist of character; and for a time she had lost most of her powers of logic. She personified "still waters run

deep." Monelli had been a strange force agitating hidden whirlpools in those depths.

But now his sinister influence was dead, along with Bannister and Shaw.

"What else did you tell him?"

"Only that Isobel carried some manuscripts she was preparing for Mr. Bannister. And some other papers. That's why he had to take particular care of her, he said."

"Good God!" I shattered the room's Oriental quiet. "What papers?"

"Something Mr. Bannister had been working on a long time. He never let me see them."

"Who hired Monelli for this job?"

"I don't know that either. But it must have been Hugh Bannister. He seemed most worried about Isobel. And Ramon told me I wasn't to let anybody know he was guarding her. He said she'd get even more nervous."

"That's no lie!" I was grimly furious. Then I asked, "What do you know about a series of articles by McKelvey Ransome?"

Her chestnut eyes rounded with amazement. "Those were the manuscripts Isobel took to Utah."

"I thought so." And I shot abruptly, "Does the word 'key' mean anything to you?"

"Nothing at all." She was quite positive.

"And Larrabee— Have you any new opinions about him now?"

She hesitated. "No. Mr. Larrabee is all right. He's . . . he's what they call a 'public-spirited citizen' in San Francisco."

I grunted. Through the windows dawn was spreading a malignant, reddish aura that boded another stormy day. I thought for a moment of returning to my own apartment; then changed my mind. I started shucking my sodden tweed coat.

Janice Howe stared. "What are you doing?"

"Listen, baby," I said, "Monelli's gorillas want me—and bad. And I aim to make it tough for them to find me. This is the last place they'd look. So I'm accepting your invitation to spend what's left of the night."

The girl didn't even put up an argument. She took my jacket and pointed to the daybed. "I'll bring you some blankets."

I guess I slept about four hours. It was a poled-ox slumber that left me lightheaded when I awoke. For an instant I imagined I was back in my own place I smelled rich, fragrant coffee. Then Janice's voice came from the kitchen.

"Are you awake, Mr. Hunt?"

"Practically. Where's my clothes?"

She entered. My suit had been pressed; at least, as well as any woman can press wet clothes with a household iron. When she left, I dressed quickly. Breakfast was laid on the dinette table. Janice Howe had suddenly snapped back to normal. She was playing the practical, logical career-girl rôle nobly.

As I munched toast, I scanned the morning paper.

The cops weren't making much

progress in their "Winged Horse Murder." They had no new clues. Nor did they seem to know where to start looking for Isobel Peters and Hugh Bannister, their principal suspects. Once again I derived scant pleasure from omission of my name in the baffling case. That meant just one thing—my adversaries wanted me for themselves. It wasn't a pretty thought.

Then two other completely unrelated items drew my attention.

That well-known philanthropist and patron of the arts, Mr. Lawrence Larrabee, would preside personally tonight at the opening of the annual Modern Art Exhibition at the museum he'd endowed near Golden Gate Park, the first story said.

Running about a half column, the other yarn described the pending Senate war-profits investigation. The probe would be conducted by Senator Manley Beam, a stalwart mid-Westerner whose political honesty was as unquestioned as the quality of his own native state's tall corn.

One of the suspected outfits was Amalgamated Shipbuilding!

After breakfast I thanked Janice Howe, who accepted my gratitude as calmly as if she had half-drowned fugitives as guests every night, and then I left. I wanted to go home for one last look around my own digs. I wanted to find the "key."

To make doubly sure that Monelli's bullyboys weren't hanging around, I rode the trolley a full block past my grimy establishment, peering long and hard at the unkempt palms and banana trees in the dark courtyard. The coast was clear.

Nothing inside had been disturbed. My earlier visitors must have been satisfied with their one call, the kidnap visit. Feeling stale and beaten, I mechanically put the coffee pot on the stove. Still in a sort of daze, I reached for the soiled cup on the shelf, Isobel's cup. As I shoved it under the hot water spigot, something glistened in the coffee sludge on the bottom. I looked.

It was a key

On one side was embossed "Oakland Ferry Terminal Lockers." The other bore the number "203." I cursed myself for a fool. Here in my grasp was the very thing Isobel had sought so desperately to describe in that lipstick note. Pocketing the damned, blessed piece of brass, I dashed out like a madman, heading down the precipitous hill to Haight Street and a taxi.

All across town, spinning over the endless Bay Bridge, and even as I was retrieving the precious contents of Box 203, my mind worked a mile a minute, fitting jigsaw puzzles together. So *this* was what Isobel had almost confessed doing at the ferry terminal, ditching the brief case in the most logical place in the world, a public checkroom. Her unsureness of me, then, caused her sudden refusal to talk, until too late.

Or was it too late?

Monelli, whoever and whatever he really was, had the amazing patience of a crouching tiger. Thus he had waited for Isobel's vacation to end, knowing her schedule to a split-

second T. Thus his goons let her leave the train unhampered. They figured they could handle her at their own leisure on the ferry.

But that very patience gave Isobel the few scant minutes needed to hide the portfolio. It might save her now. For as long as I literally held this damning brief case, Monelli hardly dared dispose of her.

So I hopefully reasoned as the cab whirled me back to San Francisco. On sheer inspiration, I went to the Public Library where I guessed my research could be conducted safely. Monelli's mobsters hadn't looked like the literary type.

Right on top of the slim brown leather case, neatly paper-clipped into a bundle, lay the errant Harrison Bates' manuscripts.

But the author's name itself was a pseudonym. I swore softly. Any idiot should have known, any idiot but myself. H.B.! Harrison Bates, Hugh Bannister. As interchangeable as diapers. And by the time I finished perusing the two articles, I knew why Amalgamated's agents would stop at nothing to retrieve them. Or to snuff out the lives of anybody who learned their contents.

Heads would go if these savage, knifelike words ever reached the cruel light of print. Some lofty heads.

McKelvey Ransome's stories came next. They were the debater's skillful rebuttal. Read without the Bates-Bannister text, they sounded convincing. They could even have swayed the forthcoming Beam Committee investigation. But alongside the devastating paragraphs of the murdered editor's exposures, they had the phoniness of dime-store cologne.

To me they also reeked of violent death.

Appended to both files were Bannister's tragic, prophetic memorandum to Isobel. His notes became the last testament of a hero who wanted his life's work to survive his own violent end. Isobel Peters was heiress to that perilous legacy.

One memorandum stated flatly that both Bannister and Shaw intended to resign from *Pegasus* before printing the Ransome series. They planned to publish the Bates material independently.

Other notes sketched the course of their exhaustive investigations. They told how Bannister sent Oland Shaw to meet Senator Beam in Chicago; how he learned that Larrabee, too, had visited the Windy City during the Beam Committee's field sessions; and how the publisher stymied Shaw's attempts to see the senator.

"Our pious boss," wrote Bannister, "worked hard during the war, buying off the right people, throwing contracts toward Amalgamated, reaping fat profits."

And McKelvey Ransome finally was tabbed for me as Amalgamated's Washington lobbyist. Things began to dovetail; that old jigsaw puzzle was clicking again. A final notation in Bannister's inevitable red pncil listed Larrabee's stock interest in the shipbuilding firm. It was a hidden, absolute corporate control. It meant millions in easy war loot.

Somehow, Bannister knew his sands were running out.

So he sent Isobel to imagined safety with the physical evidence Monelli needed to complete his grisly task, the stuff I now held.

Eliminating Bannister and Shaw was easy for hoodlums who learned their trade in the days of Capone and prohibition. Framing Isobel adhered to Monelli's brutal form. Thus far the plot had succeeded. The world believed, through its willing press, that a lovesick, neurotic female editor had fled with her boss after cold-bloodedly slaying the respectable family man who was his rival.

And I, Danny Hunt, was the only living soul who knew the whole diabolical truth.

All this left the next move squarely up to me. All by myself I gave a here-goes-nothing shrug and prepared to make my capture by Larrabee quite simple. For as long as Larrabee had the slimmest chance of seizing me, Isobel would be kept alive. I was sure of that. He figured that eventually I would acquire the Bannister file, which he had to keep from the authorities at all costs. But once I went to the police, Isobel was a goner. And her death then would complete the crime which the law already was about to pigeonhole among its Unsolved Cases.

IV.

My first step was renting a tuxedo. It didn't fit very well, but it gave me the raffish look of a painter about to attend the Modern Art Exhibition at the Larrabee museum. I tucked the brief case under my arm and boarded a tram.

At the great bronze museum doors a uniformed flunky stiff-armed me to a halt, but I froze him with a Bohemian stare, snarled, "Exhibitor," tapped the bag as though it contained priceless canvases, and barged in. I spotted Larrabee near an impromptu bar where the art lovers were guzzling free champagne.

Partially concealed by a marble statue of a bulky-limbed nymph done in the sexless modern manner with geometric breasts and mathematical shoulders, I waited. Pretty soon I saw his bald dome bobbing toward an archway that gave into the palm-studded patio.

So I nipped through the throng, spilling a few beakers of champagne, and eased alongside him.

His bulgy blue eyes opened wide as he caught sight of me. But otherwise he betrayed no surprise. "Mr. Hunt, I believe," he said in his squeaky voice.

"You believe correctly, Mr. Larrabee." I omitted politeness. "I want words with you."

"Shall we sit?" He indicated a granite bench. We sat. "Where were you today, Mr. Hunt? You didn't report for work. In a new employee that's not—"

But I cut in, "Suppose you tell me where I was!"

"I'm afraid I don't follow you."

I played his game. "Mr. Larrabee, I damned near got killed not many hours ago. Only a lot of luck

and a cold swim in the Bay saved me. Bannister wasn't quite so fortunate. He took a swim, too, but he didn't enjoy it at all. Because he was dead."

"Bannister dead!"

"Like a mackerel."

Larrabee seemed to catch his breath a moment, and when he spoke his voice sounded almost deep. "This is terrible, Mr. Hunt. Truly terrible. But it is not entirely unexpected. I have feared something like this for a long, long time."

I waited.

"Bannister was enmeshed in affairs which could lead only to Disaster," Larrabee went on, relapsing into his peculiar vocal capitals. "In his zeal for Truth, he overstepped himself."

"How?" I asked curtly.

"Mr. Hunt," the publisher said patiently, "life is complicated. Its very complexity makes conclusion-jumping an exceedingly dangerous sport. Bannister was a conclusion-jumper."

I had been hugging the brief case, which Larrabee studiously ignored, but suddenly I thrust it under his massive nose.

"This thing," I said, "is full of conclusions. Some of them look pretty bad for somebody." Before he could speak I added tautly, "Where's Isobel Peters?"

Larrabee stayed icy calm.

"Miss Peters has been my house guest for the past two days. When I realized the sinister trend of events, I took steps to protect her."

"You mean you kidnaped her!"

"That," Larrabee said quietly, "is an unpleasant way to put it. And not entirely accurate." He peered at his heavy gold wrist watch. "For the moment, Mr. Hunt, I have certain obligations to the people here. I must leave you. But I suggest you be at my residence at eleven o'clock. 1220 Pericles Avenue. Then, I am sure, this whole sorry matter will be revealed in its proper light."

I noticed that Larrabee had dropped his sententiousness as he concluded, "And bring Miss Peters' brief case. We shall discuss its . . . its contents."

I knew he didn't expect me to run away now; he was positive, as he probably had been all his life, of his opponent's next move. He figured he had me. I'd walk right into his trap like a nice, woolly little lamb.

Larrabee was right—partly.

Outside the museum I snagged a Maroon cab driven by a hackie named Joe Selwyn. He had an honest, rugged air and a determined bulldog jaw. Besides, Selwyn had also been a Marine. I trust Marines in tight places.

"Joe," I said, "d'you want a good job for a few hours?"

He turned in his seat. "Cripes, Danny Hunt! And all dolled up like Mrs. Astor's horse. Got any dough?"

I flashed my last twenty.

"For that," Joe said, "plus my deep regard for you, chum, I'm your man. *Semper fidelis!*"

When I said I wanted to be at Lawrence Larrabee's Pericles Avenue mansion at eleven o'clock, he

whistled. "Goin' high society, ain't you?"

"Depends on your point of view," I said.

To kill time we went to a murky little Haight Street bar and inhaled some beers while I briefed him on the mission. It was risky, I told him, and might spell trouble. Lots of trouble.

Joe shot me a hard look. "Blackmail?"

"No," I said. "Maybe murder."

Right then Joe started to leave. But I laid my fist on his arm. "I'm not murdering anybody, fella. I'm going in as a decoy. Trying to prevent a murder, a beautiful dame's!"

He relaxed again and I produced the brief case. I extracted its contents. "If I don't come out of Larrabee's palace in exactly fifteen minutes, hale and hearty, you highball to police headquarters. Tell 'em to get there in a hell of a hurry." Joe took the papers. "These look harmless," I concluded. "But they're not. They're pure dynamite."

Right on time I stood on Larrabee's flagstone veranda wielding the monstrous brass lion's-head knocker with my right hand. The empty brief case was in the other. Thin, icy rain was falling again, sifting through pea-soup mist. Somewhere, miles below, deep-throated foghorns moaned, reminding anybody who cared that San Francisco Bay still existed.

A frozen-faced butler opened the door so promptly he must have been waiting just inside the vestibule.

He led me immediately into a redwood-paneled library whose principal illumination seemed to be a roaring fire. The tawny glow danced against wide French doors that led into a walled, formal garden.

Then I saw her.

As I entered the dim room, trying to accustom my eyes to the uncertain light, Isobel Peters looked up from a deep leather armchair.

"Danny Hunt!" That's all she said.

It seemed so simple, so easy, after what had happened during the last forty-eight hours that I just stood there goggling. Finally, I asked:

"Are you all right, Isobel?"

"Yes, Danny." But her words weren't convincing.

"Then let's get out of here, fast!"

Even as I spoke, her carmine lips were framing a "shhhh!" Only I was rushing ahead with my plan for escape. "When Larrabee comes into the room, I'll keep him occupied long enough for you to go through those French doors. Then—" I stopped dead.

Our host stood framed in the library portal, a mocking smile on his strange moon face. Right behind him was Monelli. But *he* wasn't smiling at all.

"Thank you, Mr. Hunt," Larrabee observed. "It was gracious of you to come here tonight. But I knew you would. I pride myself on my judgment of human nature. And you are the sort of gallant young fool I might have been myself, if I hadn't elected to pursue power and wealth."

"I came," I finally managed, "be-

cause I wanted to learn the truth about a lot of things." I paused. Then bitterly, "You're fond of truth, Larrabee."

"I also have a great flair for the dramatic, as you already have learned," he said slowly. He wasn't speaking in those phony capital letters now. "Perhaps that is why I brought you and Miss Peters together this evening. A sort of *Pegasus* reunion of the only persons extant who possess such a distressing amount of information about certain industrial developments."

As he talked, I glanced surreptitiously at my chrome wrist watch. Eleven fifteen. I hoped to God Joe Selwyn had obeyed instructions.

"And now, Mr. Hunt, the brief case. If you please."

Both Larrabee and Monelli edged close as I tendered the leather case. Isobel's face had turned pale as death itself; and I tried to reassure her with a sidewise grin. But it turned into a wry grimace. I looked longingly toward the French doors.

Larrabee fumbled with the brief case clasp.

It opened.

There was a split-second of silence you could hang your hat on. Both men peered stupidly into the container's utter emptniess as if unable to comprehend what I'd done. And in that instant, I acted.

I dove headlong at Monelli's trimly shod feet. Something made a hell of a roar and singed my neck, but I hit his ankles and he went down hard. I drove my fist into his olive face. He stayed put. Blood bubbled from his thin mouth. In my sudden rage I even forgot Larrabee.

Then I clambered slowly to my feet, expecting to feel the muzzle of the publisher's own gun against my ribs. But our host was otherwise engaged.

His hands extended high over his bald head, quite empty.

And Joe Selwyn loomed as big as a Sherman tank in the double-space of the French doors. He was waving the prettiest, loveliest, sweetest service .45 automatic I'd ever seen. I moistened my dry lips.

"Where's the law, Joe?"

He gave me a reproachful look. "Aw, Danny, you didn't really expect a Marine to holler for help, did you?"

"But—"

"When your fifteen minutes was up, I just skinned over that garden wall for a little reconnoitering. It was a cinch. This guy left his flanks ungarded. That is, after I took care of a couple of rear-echelon bums outside." Joe cleared his throat apologetically. "Shall I call the cops now?"

"Yes," I said, "do that!"

So while Joe went to phone, I took over the satisfying job of covering Lawrence Larrabee with the automatic. Isobel moved toward me. Very close. And then I committed a pardonable breach of etiquette for purely tactical reasons. I kissed her with my eyes wide open.

THE END.

emeralds have no Home

BY FRANK DONOVAN

Papa DuPontel finds himself beaten at his own game . . .

MARTIN walked down the *Calle Florida,* the Bond Street of Buenos Aires, pushing his way through the hurrying crowd of holiday revelers which covered the smooth asphalt from curb to curb. Every building was draped in bunting for the approaching holiday, pale-blue and white, the Argentine colors. At every window hung flags, Argentine, British, French, Belgian, Italian, even an occasional American, until the riot of color became inconceivable.

The twenty-fifth of May was one of the big patriotic holidays of the Argentine. There was even a street named after it in the downtown business section. By all rights Martin should have joined in the boisterous merrymaking. But his heart wasn't in it. After three years in Buenos Aires, he was beginning to experience that pang of emotion known as homesickness. He wanted to go back to New York.

But a trip to the States involved a little matter of money and that was something he did not have at the moment. His entire bankroll, which nestled in his wallet, consisted of exactly sixty-three dollars.

About halfway down the block he turned into the Tropicale Bar. The place was jammed with laughing people celebrating. Blue clouds of smoke filled the air and at the far end of the room a six-piece band beat out the savage rhythm of a conga.

Martin made his way to the long modernistic bar and crowded

through the throng of people to occupy one of the leather-topped stools.

"Hello, Pedro," he greeted the bland-faced bartender. "Give me a San Martin."

Pedro quickly mixed the drink, which was first cousin to a Martini, and put the glass on the bar. Martin sat staring at the drink in moody silence.

He didn't really notice the girl until she took the stool next to him. She was an oddly colorless girl in spite of the expensive clothes she wore. Her hair was cut straight across the forehead, while the back was arranged in a neat but uninspired coiffure. Her eyes were blue and timid, seeming to withdraw behind the horn-rimmed glasses she wore. In the subdued light of the bar the absence of rouge and powder was very noticeable.

Ordinarily, Martin wouldn't have given her a second glance. But while she sat there waiting for her cocktail his eyes fell on the necklace about her throat. He was no authority on jewels, but the string of emeralds she wore was worth a small fortune, he knew. They were perfectly matched and the feeble rays from the bar lights made them look as though they were alive.

He felt a pulse begin to beat in his throat. The necklace had ceased to be a string of emeralds to him. Instead, he saw it as a ticket back to New York.

"You're American, aren't you?" he heard himself ask.

A curtain fell over her eyes when she turned to look at him. "Yes."

He smiled disarmingly. "So am I. From New York."

The curtain parted a little and she reflected his smile. "I live on Long Island."

He was sure now. Long Island and emeralds went hand-in-hand in his book.

"Are you here on a vacation?" he inquired politely.

She nodded. "I just flew in from Rio yesterday. It's a good thing I made reservations in advance. I had forgotten all about the holidays."

"Where are you staying?" His voice had an inflection that assured her he asked purely from impersonal courtesy.

She hesitated, then said, "The Grand Hotel."

"You were lucky to get a room there," he agreed. He mashed out his cigarette and waved at Pedro. "Shall we have another drink?"

"I don't know whether I should or not," she began.

But she offered no objection when the glasses were set before them. Martin continued the conversation along a light vein for several rounds. His talk of "good old New York" seemed his best weapon and he pressed the attack with restrained vigor.

"Is the rest of your party due here pretty soon?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm quite alone." She said it in a rather proud way, as though she had never been on her own before.

"You don't mean that you're traveling by yourself?" His eyes were blurred, but his mind was sharp and eager.

"My maid is with me." Her tongue was beginning to get a little thick.

He relaxed a little. "By the way, don't you think it's time we introduced ourselves?"

There was a lock of hair which had fallen over her left eye. She opened her mouth and blew upward, relieving the view temporarily.

"My name is Scott Martin."

"I'm Jean Ross."

He held out his hand with mock courtesy. "I'm very happy to know you, Jean."

She accepted his hand in the same spirit of jest. "I'm glad to know you, too, Scott."

They laughed. He still held her hand. They both looked down at the same time, at the smooth whiteness of her hand resting in his brown palm. On her third finger was a diamond ring which caught Martin's eye instantly.

"That's a lovely ring," he commented.

"Are you an expert on jewelry?"

"Somewhat," he lied.

"What do you think that ring is worth?"

Tiny furrows of concentration wrinkled his forehead. "I'd say about a thousand."

There was bitterness in her voice. "That's what I thought, too!"

"What do you mean?"

"It's paste!"

Martin's eyebrows shot up questioningly.

"I bought it this morning in a shop on the *Calle Callao,*" she explained. "It seemed such a beautiful stone that I couldn't resist it. The jeweler kept pointing out the fact that it was a blue-white diamond and a real bargain. After I left the store I stopped in another one farther down the street and he informed me that it was paste."

She paused to sip her drink. "I guess I should have known better when he mentioned the blue-white part about the stone. I remember my father telling me once that a blue-white diamond was very rare, and he certainly wouldn't sell one this size for a thousand dollars!"

Martin's eyes narrowed. "You didn't by any chance get it from a fat little Frenchman called Papa DuPontel?"

"Why, yes! How did you know?"

"There's only one man capable of making an imitation as perfect as that." He laughed. "In his own way, I guess you would call Papa an artist. Some of his jewels have winked their way into the best museums in the world."

"What can I do about it?"

"Nothing. The police won't bother him. Money buys protection in any city."

"Which means that I'm just out a thousand dollars." She blew at the strand of hair again.

"It looks that way." His eyes fell on the emeralds again. "Those aren't paste, too, are they?"

"No. Father gave these to me before I left on my trip."

"You shouldn't be wearing them out like this," he admonished. "Especially during a crowded holiday."

"Oh, they're insured," she answered carelessly. The full effect of the drinks was beginning to hit her. She swayed a little and Martin reached out a hand to steady her.

"Let's dance," she suggested.

He nodded and led her onto the tiny dance floor. The jasmine perfume from her hair swirled about his face when he held her close. He could feel the vibrant warmness of her body against his and, for an instant, he felt a little pang of regret. Then visions of New York rose before his eyes and the feeling of regret disappeared as completely as though it had never existed.

"It's hot and stuffy in here," she whispered. "Let's go to my hotel room and have a drink."

"All right," he agreed.

He took her arm again and led her out of the bar. They pushed their way through the seething mass of people toward the hotel. Arches of colored lights spanned the *Calle Florida* from one end to the other, converting the street into a vast exposition.

The over-decorated lobby of the hotel was filled with celebrating people also. Still holding Jean's arm with a tight grip, Martin threaded through the formidable mass of humanity. They got into the elevator, rose to her floor and followed the curve of the hall to her suite.

"Be real quiet," she cautioned as they entered. "I don't want to wake Julie."

Then she faced him and put her arms about his neck. Her lips found his and for a moment he pulled her to him with savage tenderness.

Suddenly, she started to sag. He picked her up quickly, carried her across the room and deposited her on the couch. She had passed out completely.

Martin picked up her coat, which had dropped on the floor, and spread it over her. He thought she looked strangely like a little girl sleeping there. Bending down, he let his mouth touch hers again tenderly. Then he rose, opened the door and stepped out into the hallway.

As he rode down in the elevator, his hand unconsciously toyed with the emerald necklace in his pocket.

He saw her the next day at noon. They had lunch in the hotel dining room. As he held the chair for her, he noticed that the smoothness of her forehead was marred by a series of wrinkles caused from the deep frown on her face.

"What's the matter?" he inquired casually as he took the menu offered by the waiter. "Got a hangover?"

She shook her head. "No, I feel all right. It . . . it's something else."

"What?"

"I don't know quite what to do about it."

"About what?"

"I seemed to have lost my emerald necklace last night. I don't remember losing it, but it wasn't there when I woke up this morning."

Martin laughed. "Is that all? Don't you remember breaking the catch and asking me to have it fixed for you?"

The frown was replaced by a look of doubt. "Are you having it fixed?"

"Yes. I left it this morning. It should be ready by the end of the week."

"Where did you leave it?"

"I left it with a friend of mine. He has a small jewelry store off the avenue. It isn't as swanky as some of the big ones, but I've known him a long time and he is very good at his work, and very trustworthy."

She bit her lip a moment. "I . . . I don't want to seem ungrateful or anything, but would it be possible for me to see the necklace?"

"Of course. I know exactly how you feel. You only met me yesterday and I don't blame you a bit."

"You're very understanding."

He reached across the table and patted her hand.

After lunch they took a stroll down the *Avenida de Mayo*. When they had gone several blocks, Martin took her hand and led her into a side street. Two blocks down they stopped before a tiny jewelry store.

"Is this it?" she inquired.

He nodded. "Let's go in and I'll show you the necklace."

A tall, hungry-looking individual stepped forward when they entered. His eyes lit up when he saw Martin. "Ah, *amigo*. How are you?"

"I'm just fine, Carlos. This is Miss Ross, the lady who owns the emerald necklace I brought you this morning."

"Oh, of course. I haven't had a chance to fix it as yet; I have just finished taking the clasp off."

"We'd like to see the necklace a moment, if we could."

"*Si, si!* Just a moment."

Carlos disappeared into the rear of the store, coming back a moment later with the emerald necklace. He spread it on the counter for them to see.

"I have a beautiful clasp ordered for you," Carlos told Jean. "It should be here very soon. Maybe by the end of the week; maybe not until the following week. I hope the delay won't inconvenience you?"

"Oh, no. That's quite all right," Jean assured him. All doubt was erased from her face now and she smiled at both men happily. "Shall we go now, Scott?"

Martin bid the jeweler good-by and they left.

Lined with many fine shops and modern apartment buildings, the *Calle Callao* corresponded more closely in some ways to Fifth Avenue than the celebrated *Avenida de Mayo*. It was a fitting setting for the ornate jewelry store of Papa DuPontel.

The interior of the store was almost cloying in its luxury. Rows of glass showcases lined the room, presenting to the customer's eye a staggering display of precious stones in varying ranges of prices, settings, styles of cutting, and even of color.

The store had just opened when Martin entered. A suave little man in a frock coat hurried forward

soundlessly.

"*Buenos dias, señor,*" he greeted the American. "What can we do for you?"

Martin walked to the nearest showcase and dropped the emeralds on the glass top carelessly. The clerk winced as though it had hurt him physically. He simply couldn't understand how anyone could handle precious stones in that manner.

"You want to sell these?" he asked in a suspicious manner.

"Oh, no!" Martin hastily answered. "My wife would have me boiled in oil!" He took the emeralds from the reluctant hands of the other and held up the clasp for inspection. "I want to get another clasp put on in place of this one."

The clerk screwed his jeweler's "eye" into place and gave the clasp a thorough examination. "There is nothing wrong with this one, señor."

"I know. That's what I tried to tell my wife but"—he gave a short laugh—"you know how women are when they've set their hearts on anything."

"What kind of clasp does the señora wish?"

Martin rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Well, she wants a platinum one, but I don't know—"

While his customer was thinking, the clerk picked up the necklace again and studied it. "This is a lovely item, señor," he said.

"Yeah, it's pretty nice. Almost looks real, doesn't it?"

The little man's mouth fell open in spite of himself. "I beg your pardon, señor. Do you mean that this isn't a real emerald necklace?"

Martin shook his head. "No, it's paste. But it's a neat imitation, don't you think?"

The clerk bent over the necklace once more. When he straightened up, his eyes were puzzled.

"Will you pardon me a moment, señor? I shall return immediately."

"Sure. I'm kind of undecided about what kind of clasp to put on, anyway."

The little man disappeared through a door behind the counter. Martin idly lit a cigarette while he waited and gazed about the store. Outwardly, he gave no hint to the storm of excitement raging inside him.

Suddenly, the door opened again and the little clerk entered followed by a man who was somewhat of a shock at first sight. He was short, but he must have weighed all of three hundred pounds. He had a small face, which was topped by thin gray-streaked hair. His sensitive mouth was twisted in a polite smile, but his eyes were bleak and cold.

"*Bon jour, monsieur,*" he greeted Martin. "I am Papa DuPontel."

Martin pretended to be puzzled, but returned the other's greeting.

"I own this store," the fat man went on to explain. His tongue darted out and licked his lips. "I understand you have an emerald necklace?"

"Yes." Martin nodded toward the necklace lying on the glass. Papa picked it up with tender care and examined it closely. Presently, he

looked up and said, "Did I understand, monsieur, that you said these were paste?"

"Yes, they're paste. Why?"

Papa appeared to be at a loss for words. "They are almost like the real thing."

Martin laughed. "I'll admit that they are almost flawless imitations, but they are paste, nevertheless. I've had them for years; that is, my wife has. I know the chap who made them for her. He's been a good friend of ours for several years."

Papa's eyes narrowed in a calculating manner. Martin could imagine what he was thinking: "If this fool American thinks that these are paste I'll play along with him. I've seen this situation before. The best friend is the wife's secret lover and he gives the woman an emerald necklace. In order to hide her indiscretions she is forced to tell the husband that they are paste."

Papa smiled and the rolls of fat hid the cunning look in his eyes. Martin stared back at him with an innocent expression.

"Would you consider selling this necklace?" the fat man inquired.

"No, I couldn't! My wife has had it for years and—"

"We could trade you something much nicer for her," the clerk spoke up.

Papa turned and silenced him with a fierce glare.

"I really couldn't," Martin insisted. "It's not me, you understand? It's just that my wife has had it for so long that it has a great sentimental value."

"I can imagine," Papa said dryly. "I will give you three thousand dollars for the necklace!"

Martin blinked. "Three thous . . ." His voice broke off as though the full meaning of the other's words had hit him.

"*Oui, monsieur,*" Papa said. "Three thousand dollars."

Martin was the picture of tortured indecision. "I . . . I don't hardly know what to do. My wife is out of town or I could call her. She prized it so highly, but three thousand dollars is a lot of sentiment."

The fat Frenchman picked up the emeralds and silently lavished his admiration on them.

"I feel kind of guilty taking that much money for just a string of paste emeralds," Martin said.

"Think nothing of it, monsieur. I am a connoisseur of beauty and an imitation like this fascinates me as much as though it were genuine."

"I'll sell it on one condition," Martin decided abruptly.

"What is that?"

"That you will give me a written statement that you bought the necklace with the full knowledge that it was paste. I wouldn't want anyone to think that I sold it to you as the real thing."

Papa DuPontel nodded. This would protect him in case of trouble with the erring wife. "Of course, monsieur. I understand perfectly. If you will step this way I will write up the document."

Martin followed the Frenchman though the doorway, down a narrow hall and into a large cheerful

room. Papa seated himself behind his desk and commenced to write on a piece of paper. For several seconds the scratching of the pen was the only sound in the room. Martin stood gazing at a picture on the wall. He held the emeralds carelessly in his hand.

"There you are," Papa DuPontel said. He held out a piece of paper covered with neat writing. Martin glanced over it quickly, then stuck it in his pocket.

"And the three thousand?" he inquired.

As if in answer to his question the door opened and the clerk entered. He handed a packet of money to Papa, who in turn passed it to Martin. The latter counted the money with an experienced eye and handed over the necklace.

"I still can't understand why you want to pay that much for a string of imitation emeralds, but I guess you have your reasons."

"We collectors have our idiosyncrasies, monsieur. Good day!"

Martin took this as a dismissal and quickly took his leave.

The lobby of the Grand Hotel was almost deserted when Martin entered. He didn't bother to stop at the desk. Instead, he entered the elevator and went up to Jean's suite. He rapped on the door softly and a moment later it was opened by a girl in a maid's uniform.

"Oh, Mr. Martin. Come in."

"Is Miss Ross in?"

"She just got up. She's in her bath right now. Will you come in and wait?"

He shook his head. "No, I haven't time right now." He reached in his pocket and drew forth the emerald necklace and handed it to the maid.

"Why, those are Miss Jean's emeralds!" she exclaimed.

"Yes. She gave the necklace to me to have the clasp fixed for her. I just picked it up at the jeweler's and thought I had better leave it before I lost it."

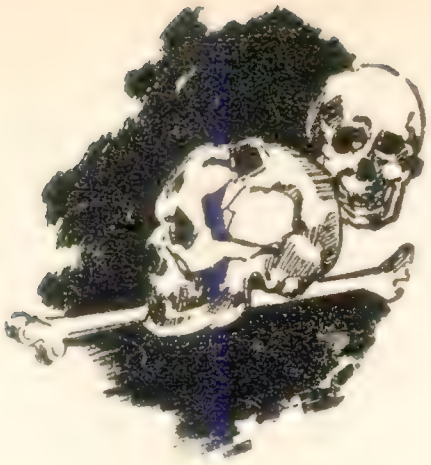
The maid smiled.

"Give this to her also, will you? It's a thousand dollars she paid for a diamond ring last week." He pushed the money into the astonished girl's hands. "Tell her Papa DuPontel had a change of heart. She'll understand."

He turned away from the maid's surprised look and reentered the elevator. There was a twisted smile on his lips when he thought about the two thosuand dollars in his wallet. After he had given Carlos his thousand for making a paste imitation of the emerald necklace, he would still have a thousand left. Those crisp bills meant home.

He wondered how Papa DuPontel would feel when he discovered he had actually purchased an imitation necklace. It had been a tough job for Carlos to have a string of paste emeralds made in such a short time, much tougher than the job of switching necklaces on the Frenchman.

THE END.



Fossil skull

BY FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

In his enthusiasm as an anthropologist, Danny Reagan for a time forgot that he was a detective, too.

I.

THE postman, a mild little fellow, invariably approached Professor Carmody's home in a spirit of adventure. Fossilized skulls which the anthropologist had excavated from Alaska's frozen gravels leered from dusty shelves. Arrowheads rattling in the brain cavity of some hinted at violent deaths centuries ago, and several had been bashed in by blunt weapons. Ivory-headed harpoons stood in corners or rested on convenient pieces of old furniture, along with primitive utensils. There were scores of whales, seals, walrus and Arctic birds exquisitely carved from fossil ivory to intrigue a man who spent his life going from door to door.

As usual, this afternoon, the postman ventured a peek through the dusty windowpane. Momentarily, he froze with horror, then he sat weakly on the porch railing and tried to collect his suddenly scattered thoughts.

Professor Carmody was sprawled on the floor at the foot of the stairs, an ivory harpoon in his left breast. The postman knew from the horrible purple and slack jaw of the anthropologist's face that he was dead. He ran a hundred yards to the next house and asked to use the telephone. He remembered that Danny Reagan, a detective lieutenant study-

ing anthropology, had visited Carmody only that morning.

There had been angry outbursts from Carmody, but the postman was confident the anthropologists were not quarreling. There was an almost father-son relationship between them. "Lieutenant Reagan," he blurted as soon as the detective answered, "I'm the postman. Professor Carmody has fallen, or something, on a harpoon, and he's dead."

"What?" Danny's voice almost ruptured an eardrum. The postman repeated his news. "I didn't go inside. I remembered what I'd read in detective stories about well-meaning folks trying to be helpful and ending up by ruining good clues."

"Don't let anyone go in there," Danny said. "I'll be right out."

Danny was on his way three minutes later, with siren going and traffic edging to the curb to give him room. Scotty MacLean, his working partner, dreaded the wild rides. He was forever dreaming there had been a crash and his conscience being watched from the spirit world while his body was being removed from the wreck. Sometimes the body was salvaged easily enough. But on occasions, when the dream was really bad, salvage was achieved only with hacksaws and torches.

But today, Scotty forgot his own fears because of the utter sadness he saw mixed with the grimness of Danny Reagan's face. The postman, pale and nervous, was waiting. "Nobody's been around," he reported.

"Thanks," Danny answered. He tried the door. It was unlocked and he remembered Professor Carmody's doors were unlocked except when he was away, or had retired for the night. Danny's eyes took in details before he stepped into the room.

The death instrument was a typical Eskimo harpoon. The wooden shaft was about six feet long. The harpoon end was fitted with a cleverly carved piece of walrus ivory carved to a point the size of a lead pencil. A hole in the barb proper fitted over the pencil-like point. The barb was also fitted with a steel cutting edge.

As soon as the Eskimo had harpooned a seal, the barb detached itself from the shaft, which was tossed aside, and the seal was then brought in with a line attached to the barb. It was the barb which had penetrated Professor Carmody's chest over the heart.

"What do you think, Scotty?" Danny asked. "It's hard for me to view objectively the body of one of my best friends. My friend and my teacher."

"There's only one way it could be suicide," Scotty answered, and he saw Danny's face flush with indignation. "If Professor Carmody had stopped halfway downstairs, put the barb against his chest, pointed the other end of the shaft toward the corner where it evidently stopped dead, then fell forward, he would kill himself. Something like the old Romans falling on their swords after defeat. From what you've told me of the old gentleman his life was too full, he had too much unfinished

business to even think of suicide."

"That's right."

"It couldn't have been an accident. A man would naturally carry a harpoon, barb forward," Scotty continued. "But with a shaft that long, grasping it in the center as he would naturally do, he wouldn't get the barb opposite his side, much less in front of his chest. Danny, I can't imagine why anyone would want to murder this kindly old professor. But that's what I think it is, murder followed by a hurried and clumsy attempt to make it look like an accident."

"You're right, Scotty," Danny agreed. He called the coroner.

"But the motive?" Scotty asked, after considerable thought.

"When millions of dollars are at stake there are always motives kicking around," Danny replied. "Did you ever hear of the Klawish National Forest in Alaska?"

"Sure," Scotty answered. "There's been a lot in the newspapers about it. Some outfit is going to spend millions on pulp mills. And about time, too, what with all the trees going to rot every year." Scotty's sense of thrift was often outraged.

"Here's the pitch," Danny said. "Alaska-Klawish Paper Co. made a deal for the timber. They want to operate on a sustained yield basis, never cutting more than the annual increase."

"Which means they can operate as long as people read newspapers and magazines," Scotty said.

"That's right. There was a deal, too, with the Klawish Indians who might have some claim on the timber, though they've always taken their living from the sea," Danny continued. "They live at Glacier Cove."

"So far so good," Scotty said.

"One, Pete Kehoe, shows up," Danny continued. "He's of the double-cross breed, always out for a fast buck, and studies the angles to see where he can do himself some good. Kehoe has an angle he figures worth anywhere from fifty to a hundred grand, nuisance value. He rounds up a few wretched Klucktan Indians, then goes into court. Gets an injunction stopping Alaska-Klawish Paper Co. from all operations."

"On what grounds?"

"On the grounds that the Klucktans are the rightful owners of the Klawish National Forest and that Glacier Cove is their ancient home from which they were driven by the Klawish Indians. Edison Field of the Alaska-Klawish Paper Co. called on me and asked if there was anything to the Klucktan claim. He thought an anthropologist should know. I told him he was being taken for a ride and that I would check with Professor Carmody."

"What did Carmody say?" Scotty asked.

"He hit the ceiling as he usually did when some such strange claim attacked anthropological facts," Danny answered. "I asked him if he would testify in court for Field and he said he was too busy, then told me my testimony should be enough."

"And why not?"

"I hadn't Carmody's standing in the field," Danny explained. "So I made a recording of his testimony and took it home. And later, after thinking it over, Carmody got indignant all over again and agreed to fly to Alaska with me and testify. And now—this!" He sighed heavily, and wished the coroner would hurry.

"Go outside, fella," Scotty said sympathetically, "and take a walk. Carmody was killed because he was going to testify, but you've got the recording. Think that over, and it may help a little. Not much, fella, but a little."

Danny prowled around Carmody's grounds and felt worse because the uncut lawn reminded him of the old man's explosive, "I should be shot for neglecting things. If I ever catch up with my research I'm going to devote my remaining years to my lawn and flowers."

The coroner came, made his notes, then left. The fingerprint men had arrived while Danny was prowling. They might uncover something, but Danny wasn't hopeful. He returned to headquarters and called Judge Morgan on the radio-telephone. "I'm shocked," the judge said when he heard Danny's report. "I planned to rely heavily on Professor Carmody's testimony."

"Will you admit, as evidence, a recording of Professor Carmody's opinion?" Danny asked. "I'll swear, under oath, it was made in my presence."

"I'll admit it," Judge Morgan promised, "but I'll want your testimony, also. Personally, I've never heard of the Klucktans occupying any part of Klawish National Forest, much less the Glacier Cove area, but I can't go behind the evidence. It is apparent Pete Kehoe, representing the Klucktans, has dug up something literally or figuratively. He seems very confident."

"I'll want a continuance until I can straighten out things here," Danny said. "Twenty-four hours should be enough."

"It is granted," Judge Morgan answered.

Danny knocked off work early, bought himself a fine meal, but was too depressed to do more than nibble at it, then he went home. Hearing Professor Carmody's voice would be an ordeal, but he wanted to review the professor's carefully worded testimony and refresh himself on a few points, from the recording.

"Now what the hell?" he growled. "I'd swear I put that brief case on my desk." It had been carelessly tossed onto a chair, and as soon as Danny removed the heavy envelope containing the record he knew that it was ruined. "Confound the maid," he stormed. "She dropped the brief case into the chair while dusting the desk, then sat on the case. Or did she?"

He called the maid on the apartment telephone and got the anger out of his voice. The girl worked hard and someone was always complaining. "Listen, did you drop my

brief case onto a chair while dusting?"

"Mr. Reagan," the girl answered in a defensive tone, "I've been blamed so much for not putting things back where they belong, that I just lift 'em up, dust under 'em and put 'em down again."

"Thank you," Danny answered. "I'm not complaining, just checking on a point. You've been most helpful." He hung up. So it was no accident, but deliberate destruction of evidence. The maid, he knew, might snap back, or explain, but she wouldn't lie. "I figure it this way. Pete Keheo is basing his case on manufactured evidence. He had hoped Alaska-Klawish Paper Co. would settle on a nuisance value basis. Edison Field, righteously indignant, decided to fight. So, if Kehoe is manufacturing his evidence there'll be a flaw. And it's up to me to spot it." Then he began packing for his flight to Alaska.

Danny Reagan's first glimpse of Kehoe was in front of the Alaskan courthouse just before the trial began. Personally, he took an immediate dislike to the man. "A phony," he thought, "and treacherous as they come." As a detective, he put personal dislike aside and viewed the man objectively.

The fellow, undoubtedly, had imagination and was clever in setting his stage. Newspapermen had gathered about him. He waved his hand toward a group of miserable natives. "The last of the Klucktans, gentlemen," he said. "Preyed upon, driven from their ancestral homes by the mighty Klawish Indians, and now about to be tricked of their rightful heritiage by a soul-less corporation. But this is their day in court and a wrong will be adjusted."

Danny seethed. He had met a few Klucktans at various times, and they owned gasboats and made a good thing salmon fishing. Kehoe must have worked overtime to round up this group.

Kehoe led them into the court-room, and Danny followed. Field and two lawyers joined him. He particularly liked Parker, a graying lawyer with a young face. Of Kehoe, Parker said, "His record is bad, yet he manages to keep out of jail. He is a big spender and keeps himself in funds by using his wits. Expect most anything. He has a trick of blunting a defendant's defense by unusual attack."

Five minutes after court opened, Danny understood what Parker meant. Kehoe said suddenly, "At this time I shall call the defendant's witness, Mr. Danny Reagan. Mr. Reagan, please take the chair."

The move amazed everyone, but Danny took it in stride. "Facts are facts," he told Parker, who offered to object, "and it makes little difference who brings them out."

"You are an anthropologist, specializing in Alaska, as well as a detective, are you not?" Kehoe asked.

"Yes."

"You are regarded as an authority in the Alaskan field," he continued.

"Not yet," Danny answered.

"A pupil of Carmody's if I'm not mistaken?"

"That is right. I studied under Dr. Carmody from the first and we made many field trips to Alaska," Danny answered.

"I offer plaintiff's exhibit A," Kehoe continued. "A skull, somewhat fossilized, but amazingly well-preserved. In your opinion, Mr. Reagan, is this a native or white man's skull?"

"Native," Danny answered. He had a hunch Kehoe was setting a trap.

"In your opinion, what tribe?"

"Klucktan," Danny answered without hesitation.

"Are you positive?"

"Positive," Danny replied. "There are certain bony characteristics peculiar to the Klucktans. People of different Asiatic origin came to North America over the Bering Sea at different times. Some crossed Bering Straits, possibly before the straits existed. Others came by the way of the Aleutian Islands."

"It is too involved to go into at this time, interesting as it is," Kehoe said smoothly. "We have established you as an authority in such matters, and you have identified the skull as that of a Klucktan Indian. That is all." He smiled. "Unless, of course, defendant's counsel wishes to assail this proof."

"No questions," Parker replied.

"I will now call John Pederson," Kehoe said.

Pederson, a burly, unsmiling Nordic took the stand, was sworn in and identified the skull. "Where did you find it?" Kehoe asked.

"I dug it out of a native grave in Glacier Cove," Pederson answered.

"There's only one ancient native grave in Glacier Cove," Danny exploded. "And it is under a glacier." Belatedly, he remembered. "I'm sorry for the interruption, your honor. I had forgotten for the moment that this is a court proceeding and not an anthropological discussion. I apologize."

"The apology is accepted," Judge Morgan answered. Outwardly, he was grave, inwardly vastly amused that the normally calm Danny had blown his top.

"Tell in your own words, Mr. Pederson, everything leading up to finding this skull," Kehoe said.

"This year the ice didn't come down so far," Pederson said simply, "and there was a tunnel running back from the glacier's face, so I took a chance, went in, found where they'd buried their dead, dug down and found the skull."

Danny could hardly restrain his excitement. He leaned over and whispered to Parker. "If this is true, it's one of the most amazing turns in the history of anthropology. We've known of that ancient village site; have tried to reach it in the past, but the glacier has invariably defeated us."

"And if it's true," Parker whispered back, "we've lost our case. Kehoe has proved through your own lips that it is a Klucktan skull."

"Always remembering," Danny reminded him, "that that particular

skull was found in the grave under the glacier."

Pederson finished his story and Kehoe asked, "Cross-examine?"

"Yes," Parker answered, slowly rising. "Mr. Pederson, I know nothing of glaciers. You probably do. Can you account for the tunnel? And the fact that this year ice conditions permitted exploration?"

"We had a light snowfall last winter at the glacier face," Pederson replied. "This was followed by an early spring and a hot summer. The ice retreated faster than usual. Near what was the ancient village there was a hot springs—they appear in many places throughout Alaska—and it may have been the reason why the ancient Klucktans built this village where they did. This spring helped melt the ice. Also, warm rains falling all over the glacier and running into the crevasses aided in the melting. The ice movement, breaking crevasses and forming new ones, emptied considerable water into the stream which you find flowing from under most glaciers.

"Ice immediately above the stream melts and falls, then higher up the melting and falling continue. Thus an arch is formed the length of the stream," Pederson explained with much use of his hands. "From time to time, the arch breaks and a new one is formed by the ice jamming down from overhead. There are times you can walk a quarter mile through a tunnel, then you'll be blocked by heaps of ice. If you can climb over it, and it takes nerve because there is always a chance your retreat will be cut off by falling ice, you'll find the tunnel continues. Miners, with nerve, have gone under glaciers and cleaned out pockets of placer gold."

"This is very interesting and informative," Parker said, "and I should like to hear more about it sometime. Now, Mr. Pederson, you have testified that you found this skull under the glacier. Can you verify this by witnesses who were present?"

"Yes, sir," Pederson answered. "Lars Nordstrom, Mike Dutro and Buck Fortune were with me. You see, we had to dig fast."

"So I imagine," Parker observed.

He asked several questions, then stepped over to Danny. "Do you need time to think over this new turn in affairs?" he whispered.

"Yes, I'd like to take measurements of the skull, in the presence of the court, or otherwise," Danny answered. "This is amazing. Men have actually excavated a graveyard under a glacier."

"Don't forget," Parker admonished, "that Field's people are paying you to disprove Kehoe's contentoin. I shall request a continuance until tomorrow morning."

He addressed the court, requested the continuance, then listened to Kehoe's violent protests. "Court's adjourned until tomorrow morning, ten o'clock. Mr. Reagan you have the court's permission to examine plaintiff's exhibit A."

"I protest, your honor," Kehoe said.

"Objection overruled," Morgan

answered. "You requested Mr. Reagan to examine the skull and give his opinion. He has the right to further examination."

Danny returned an hour later and found Kehoe talking to the bailiff. "I'm just playing safe," the man explained. "I want to be around when you make your examination. Any objection?"

"None at all," Danny answered genially.

He spread a newspaper down on a table, placed the skull on it and began taking measurements, at the same time commenting on anthropology. The skull slipped from his hands several times, loosening fragments of earth that had worked into the brain cavity. "Mr. Kehoe," he said, "when you're through with this, it should be donated to a museum. It is one of the finest skulls I've yet seen."

"Now there's a thought," Kehoe agreed. "You name the museum. I don't go in for skulls, myself."

"Scalps are more your line," Danny thought, remembering the men he had tricked and taken to the cleaners.

He put various parts of the skull under a magnifying glass, made notes and announced his examination complete. "I suppose you're going to testify it isn't a Klucktan skull," Kehoe said, in an irritated tone.

"Hell, no!" Danny answered. "It's the real article."

He returned the skull to the bailoff, crumpled the newspaper, dropped it into a basket and said, "See you in court." They separated, and when Kehoe was gone, Danny removed the newspaper, gathered the earth fragments that had been dislodged from the brain cavity, placed them in an envelope and put it into his pocket.

At the hotel he went into a conference with Parker. "Suppose you agree to a continuance of the temporary injunction," he said, "and give me time to dig into that old village?"

"My God, man!" Parker explained. "Are you going under that damned glacier?"

"I'll never have a better chance," Danny replied. "I'm taking a broad, unselfish view of this, both as Mr. Field's hired man and a devoted anthropologist."

"I won't get within a hundred yards of a blasted glacier," Parker declared, "but I'd like to go along."

II.

Glacier Cove was one of the most beautiful spots Danny Reagan had ever seen. The headlands forming the cove approached until they almost formed a landlocked harbor four miles long and a mile to a mile and a half in width. The ice age had ground out the cove. Green timber, bright from constant rainfall, came down to the highwater line.

The water was blue, and very deep, but at the upper end of the cove it changed to green and finally a dirty gray where the muck discharged by the stream spilled into

the cove. Here and there blocks of ice that hadn't stranded along the bank, bobbed about in the water.

Water from lofty snowfields spilled, frothed and tumbled down the mountainsides, conjuring bridal veils that seemed to flutter gently against the green background. The glacier lay in the valley like an exhausted giant, then it leaped upward, and numerous arms clutched at ice-choked passes five thousand feet above. For hours it was quiet, then as the tremendous pressure built up until something must give way, it growled and roared as ice masses lifted and fell. Crevasses formed instantly, and as instantly were closed.

The face was a series of turrets, spires and columns of ice, white with varying shades of blue. An ice arch towered above the stream, ranging from the most delicate blue tints to indigo. Thousands of drops formed and fell from the ceiling and as they fell the sunlight caught them momentarily and for that moment they were diamonds throwing blue and green flame.

Danny Reagan, Parker and several men they had hired stood within two hundred feet of the glacier's face and stared. "It is the most beautiful, and the most horrible thing I've ever seen."

There was a crack like a five-inch gun, followed by a roar of a minute's duration, deep within the ice mass, then silence save for the song of a distant waterfall and the murmur of the glacial stream.

"What is happening," Danny said, "is that the ice on the right has been stopped by a granite wall. It piles up, like water behind a dam and spills over. Either the wall was higher, two or three hundred years ago, and kept the ice back, or a series of dry spells melted it, with the help of the hot springs. Or else the flow of the hot springs was so great the ice melted almost as soon as it came over the ridge. I don't know. But I do know that once a village thrived on that flat. They probably had a counsel house; their canoes were hauled up just beyond reach of high tide—they didn't worry over storms—and the community huts were along the bank just above the beach."

"And those people were Klucktans according to the skull," Parker declared.

"Those people were Klawish," Danny answered, "or a flock of established conclusions will be knocked into a cocked hat." He looked appraisingly at the cave. Its danger was obvious. There was nothing permanent, the ice supporting the cave roof, nor the tunnel beyond. Any instant, part or all might collapse. "A man's a fool to even think of poking his head in there," he thought.

He waded along the shallow edge of the stream and in a few moments the drops from the roof fell like rain against his slicker. His hip boots splashed through deep pot holes which almost tripped him.

The ice roof made his spine crawl. In his police work he had gone into dark rooms, momentarily expecting

a knife thrust, and he had crawled along underground burrows to gambling dens in routine raids, but death had never seemed closer to his elbow than now. He shuddered, trying to rid himself of the feeling, but it persisted.

Danny reached the snout of the granite ridge and here the roof was within ten feet of the stream's surface. The floor was littered with great blocks, several of which seemed to be supporting the roof. The stream was gradually melting the clean, solid ice. The base of these masses was much smaller than the portions above the surface. It was but a question of days or even hours until the pressure shattered the supports at the weakened bases. The roof would tumble in, and the process would be repeated all over again.

An offensive odor assailed his nostrils, which he identified as a chemical element from the hot springs. The stench appeared to be working along the wall of granite and when he turned a flashlight on the wall, he found the lateral tunnel that Pederson had testified led to the ancient graveyard. It was a small tunnel and the roof was supported on one side by the ridge and the other by glacier ice that the mass had forced over the ridge. Warmth from the hot springs water and vapor caused the ice to melt more rapidly here, and the deluge of drops was much greater than in the main tunnel.

Danny stopped at a point where the hot springs bubbled from a crack in the granite ridge. An age-old rock fracture had permitted the water to escape from its source. He tasted it. "It tastes vile enough to make a strong, healthy man healthier," he observed. "And here are the tools left by Pederson and the others when they excavated. That part of his testimony was on the level. He really did penetrate to this point."

The glacier grumbled and growled above him, and he shot a worried glance at the roof. The absence of litter at this immediate point convinced him the area was relatively safe, though one small block hitting a man's head could kill him instantly.

He found a section of the ridge blackened by ancient fires and his heart began racing. It was beyond reach of the ice. The heat had cracked the rock and fragments had broken off over the years until a cave five feet in depth and seven in width had been formed. He could imagine the ancient Klawish people squatting before their fires on raw days and enjoying the reflected heat.

Danny unloaded the pack he had brought in and scraped at the blackened rock with a knife. Nothing remained that could be scraped off. The rock itself had been stained black for all its hardness. "This is a find!" he exclaimed.

He returned to daylight and anxious men gazing intently at the ice cave. "You had us worried," Parker said. Kehoe, Pederson and several others had joined Danny's party. "Convinced?" Kehoe asked,

interrupting Parker. "You found the evidence you doubted, didn't you?" There was a sneer in his tone.

"Yes, Kehoe," Danny replied, "I found where you'd dug, though there was no trace of the actual digging. Action of seepage had covered up everything. I saw a slight sand mound which was probably your dump. How do you figure the dimensions of their cemetery?"

"I didn't give that much thought," Kehoe answered. Danny thought he spoke guardedly.

"I think they must have dug graves parallel to the ridge," Danny said. "I'm going to start digging as soon as I can assemble equipment."

"You're a fool if you do," Kehoe told him. "I don't want any of it for mine. I had all I wanted."

"So did I," Pederson put in. "That glacier groanin' and growlin' all the time. And knowin' that any second the tunnel will break up and a man might have to wait months before it opened up again. It wouldn't be like a mine cave-in where a gang can go in, timber the roof and dig a tunnel to you. You just couldn't handle all that weight with timber."

"You have something there," Danny agreed. "But, still, this is one of the biggest finds of the age. It may answer a lot of questions anthropologists have been asking each other for years."

"Now just a minute," Kehoe protested. "You don't propose to hold up the trial while you dig up ancient bones?" He turned to Parker. "That isn't fair, Mr. Parker. We proved with the skull that the Klucktans lived here, that this is their rightful country, that it never rightfully belonged to the Klawish. On that basis we didn't object to the judge adjourning court. We supposed that Reagan wanted to check and make sure we really did go under the glacier. Well, now you know that we did. Or do you still doubt it?"

"I haven't the slightest doubt in the world," Danny answered. He turned to Parker. "In the interests of justice, please go before the judge and explain that I'm going to make further excavations; that I will bring out whatever skulls and bones that are uncovered. That such bones *should* confirm all that Kehoe contends."

Parker noticed Danny had unconsciously stressed the word "should" and he smiled inwardly.

"Then if the rightful owners aren't Klucktans," Kehoe demanded, checking his growing annoyance with an effort, "how'd that skull get there?"

"It could be the skull of a Klucktan slave captured by the Klawish Indians," Danny answered. "He might have died of overwork or perhaps he died naturally after long service. He was an old man when he died."

Kehoe lit a cigarette, paced nervously back and forth for nearly a minute while the others looked on in silence. "This delay is raising hell," he said savagely. "You fellows won't compromise. You won't even offer us a deal. I'm only inter-

ested in seeing that some beat-up, down-trodden people get justice. Sometimes I wonder why I ever went into the deal. I'll tell you what I'll do, Reagan. I'll risk my fool neck and help you. Get your gear together and we'll pack it in for you."

"Thanks!" Danny exclaimed. "That is co-operation! Parker, get word to the judge that we'll need a little more time, please."

"That'll be my No. 1 priority," Parker answered. He had an idea he was watching a matching of wits by a pair of past masters in the art.

It was two days before Danny Reagan could assemble his equipment and Kehoe was stunned by the number of items. First, there was nearly a half mile of fine, waterproof wire. There was a small gasoline motor to generate electric power, and a pump driven by electricity. There was suction hose; electric lamps of large size; buckets; a waterproof sleeping bag and quantities of tinned food.

"Are you going to stay in there forever?" Kehoe demanded, a sneer on his lips. Then quietly he thought, "There's an idea! It could be worked."

"I might be in there until Judgment Day," Danny answered. "You never can tell when you're working around a glacier." His smile was serious, and his eyes seemed to be fixed on something just behind Kehoe's eyes, as if studying his thoughts. "Shall we start getting the stuff in?"

"Let's get it over with," Kehoe replied.

Danny had hired a man named Brott who had agreed to keep the generator in working order. "Your job is this," he had said. "Whenever I'm in the glacier, supply me with light and power. Regardless of what happens, stay on the job."

As the others began packing in the supplies, Brott, aided by volunteers, began dragging the line to the hot springs. One trip in was enough for most of them. Brott carried in the pump, set it up, tested it; arranged the lights, tested them; and then waterproofed every splice he had made in the wires. He was sweating from both heat and the glacier's constant threat when he emerged. He set up a pup tent within a few feet of the generator, and was ready to carry out his part.

Parker's pride lashed him to the point that he made one trip, carrying twenty pounds of equipment. "You can have it, Danny," he declared on emerging. "Never has light, air and blue sky looked better to me. You aren't going to stay in there nights, I hope."

"Oh, no, dig until I uncover what I want, then come out," Danny answered.

Only a few odds and ends remained and Kehoe said, "I'll go along with you, Reagan. The sooner you get to work, the better."

As Danny started off with a load, Kehoe sauntered over to Pederson. "Got it ready?" he asked.

"All set," Pederson answered. He slipped Kehoe a small package.

"Timed for a half hour. It won't make much of a noise."

He picked up the last of Danny's gear and made his way to the hot springs. Danny had things organized, and in the glare of the electric light was at work. The pump itself had been set up on the granite shelf that had once served the ancients as a fire place. The seepage had been drawn into a small ditch and was flowing into a pit Danny had dug in the graveyard. Working a hoe back and forth sloshed the water about the pit undermining the sand. It kept caving off. The suction pump drew sand and water from the pit and discharged it through a pipe where the main glacier stream carried it off.

Danny was in high spirits. In all his work as an anthropologist he had never enjoyed a setup that required less back-breaking effort. No thawing of ground; no constant dread that pick or shovel might destroy something priceless.

"It looks like it is working," Kehoe commented. "We had to dig with a shovel." He watched several minutes. "Well, s'long." Kehoe walked slowly down the tunnel.

"S'long," Danny answered. His words echoed hollowly.

Kehoe stopped at the first large column supporting the roof a hundred feet deeper in the main cave. No one had penetrated quite this far previously, but to Kehoe's way of thinking, the column was supporting one of the greatest masses of ice. "Here's where they'll find a white man's skull with a lot of ancient native skulls, a hundred years from now," he said.

He unwrapped the package and started a clock. "Not much explosive here," he mused, "but it doesn't take much to shatter an ice column under pressure."

Parker was talking to Brott and Pederson when he felt a slight earth shock. He looked quickly at the glacier, then the color drained from his face. He pointed. The arch at the tunnel entrance was collapsing. Great blocks jammed, held momentarily, then shattered under the strain.

A deep, sullen roar came from the glacier's heart, while the sound of it echoed and reechoed against nearby cliffs and walls. Then it grew quieter, except for the minor reports as small masses shifted and found solid bases. No one spoke for over a minute. They stared at the thing which had revealed such power, then they exchanged glances. "That's the end of Reagan and Kehoe," Pederson said. He shook his head. "All of us might've been caught"

"Wait!" Brott exclaimed. "Danny's still using power. See that gage? That means he's using power. The pump is still going, the lights are on. The line wasn't cut. You see, I was afraid small blocks might fall and break the line, and I strung the wire close to the wall where there'd be some protection."

"The pump will run by itself," Pederson said. "He could be deader'n a door nail and the lights would

stay on and the pump would keep going."

"We should have thought of a telephone wire," Parker said.

"It's lucky it didn't happen when we were all in there," Pederson said. "There's nothing we can do. We can't timber ice and drive a tunnel as they do in mines."

Parker shuddered. Brott kept watching his gage. "You fellows can do what you want to," he declared, "but I'm remembering Reagan's orders. I'm keeping the generator going as long as that gage shows that light and power is being used."

"I'll help you out," Parker told him. "There's little I can do in a practical way. I've never felt as helpless. I wonder how many thousands of tons of ice moved then?"

"You should see glaciers like Taku or Columbia toss off ice in hunks as large as office buildings," Brott said.

"But you don't approach them this close?" Parker asked.

"Hell, no!" Brott answered. "They break off into the sea. Even the largest steamers keep well away."

Parker lit a cigarette, but his fingers were shaking and he had difficulty holding the lighter still. Brott interrupted, pointing at the gage. "Look!" he said in a hushed, strained voice.

"What of it?"

"The pointer goes back to zero, then it goes up again," Brott explained. "You'll notice when it is at zero the generator makes a different sound. The load is off. See! The pointer is up again."

Parker knew little of mechanics, but he recognized a change as the generator took on a burden. "It means," Brott said with mounting excitement, "that Mr. Reagan is alive. He's switching the load on and off with the hope we'll note the change and realize he's alive. Let's try something."

He opened and closed the main switch three times as a signal. It was answered as Danny cut out the pump motor and cut it in again three times.

"It's a good thing he took in plenty of grub with him," Parker said. "More and more I'm impressed with the fellow's planning against something upsetting his plans. That is probably the answer to his success as an anthropologist and detective. Brott, I'm camping with you. You give the orders and I'll obey them to the best of my ability."

"It'll be weeks, or maybe months before Kehoe and Reagan get out of there," Pederson commented. "Maybe only one's alive. I don't see any sense in us hangin' 'round here. Nothin' we can do."

III.

Danny Reagan had considered the possibility of the roof falling in when he first entered the tunnel. This possibility was responsible for the abundant supply of tinned food he had taken to the site of his activity. He was at work when the charge exploded. The explosion was not loud enough to attract his attention. The ice movement ranging

from sharp reports to deep booms was much louder.

But the explosion had set up a chain of crashes as the tunnel roof and cave dome collapsed. The resulting roar filled everything. He had the odd sensation that there was a roar in his head, heart, stomach and lungs. The dread of being hopelessly trapped swept through him, momentarily draining his courage. Stern self-discipline and cold nerve asserted itself quickly.

He had instinctively crouched against the wall to avoid falling ice. Now he looked up, ready to dodge anything that might fall. A block ten-feet distant had dropped, but that was all. The ceiling of the lateral tunnel was subjected to less movement than the parent mass, and was relatively solid. Concussion had opened a series of cracks, but there were no bad fractures.

"All hell sure let loose," he said aloud. His voice was good to his ears. The steady throb of the pump, and the constant glow of white light were reassuring. "Parker, Kehoe and the others probably think I'm done for." He thought this over a moment, then asked, "I wonder if Kehoe had time to get out? He might have been caught."

Then to let Brott know that he was alive, he had cut the motor switch and thrown it in again three times. "Good old Brott!" he exclaimed.

He started toward the main tunnel to check on the damage, but decided it would be dangerous. Too many fragments were falling. Then to occupy himself and quiet his nerves, Danny increased the size of the ditch gathering the seepage. He stopped several minutes later and sniffed. His nostrils were growing accustomed to the chemical stench from the springs. "Hm-m-m!" he exclaimed. "Now what element is that?" He leaned on his shovel, his mood thoughtful. "I'm beginning to get the pattern. It's odd, you get a few pieces. They don't exactly fit, but suddenly you see the general picture in spite of the missing pieces."

He got down into the pit which was four feet in depth and nine in length. He sloshed the water about with the shovel, washing away the sand and sending it toward the suction pipe. Tiring shortly before midnight, he heated a can of soup on the electric plate, turned off the pump and lights and sprawled on the ledge.

It was too warm for a sleeping bag and he had merely pulled off the hip boots and was sleeping on top of the bag. Hours later he awakened from a nightmarish dream. Someone was smothering him with a pillow and he was fighting for air.

He shook off the spell and groped for the switch. The air was warm, very moist and the odor from the hot springs almost unbearable. It was difficult to breathe. And he knew something was wrong, either with himself or his surroundings. The light disclosed an eerie scene. The pit and lateral tunnel were covered with a foot of water.

Danny pulled on his boots, splash-

ed about lifting tools to the ledge, shifting the pump to a safer place and preparing for the grim hours he sensed lay ahead of him. The ice at the glacier face had jammed solid and the water from the stream was backing up. He coldly measured his chances. He wouldn't drown, because there was a gradual slope from the lateral to the main tunnel. The water might fill the lower end of the lateral tunnel to the ceiling, but an air pocket would remain. His problem was whether the oxygen supply would prove ample.

He remembered a story of the "self-dumping lake." The lake formed within a glacier. When the pressure built up sufficiently the ice dam gave way and a tremendous flood was released. This had gone on for years.

Danny was mentally calculating the level the water must reach to make the pressure unbearable when he heard a cry. It was human, touched with fright or madness, and it made an eerie sound echoing along the tunnel walls. It came again, then again. "Reagan! Reeeegan!"

He turned the largest light down the tunnel. It was fitted with a reflector and made a searchlight of sorts. Kehoe's deathly white face and staring eyes fairly leaped at him. Danny could only think of a June bug drawn to the light. Kehoe rushed at it as if it were something solid that he could cling to until he regained his nerve. The man's teeth were chattering and his lower lip was slack.

Danny ran down the tunnel and caught his arm. "This way. Don't step into the pit! Get hold of yourself, man! We're going to get out of this O.K."

"Dark! Dark!" Kehoe whimpered. "And the water getting higher and higher! And when I moved I'd run into ice and slip and fall! Dark! Dark! Then your light!" He started to put his hands on the hot bulb, as if to caress it. Danny knocked his hand aside.

"Want to burn yourself?" he shouted. "Pull yourself together, man!" Then he grasped Kehoe by the shoulders and began shaking him until the man threatened to fall apart. "Pull yourself together," he repeated, missing the incongruity of his act and order.

"Don't leave me," Kehoe pleaded.

"I'm stuck with you," Danny said in disgust.

"It's getting hotter," Kehoe gasped. "I can't take it."

Even Danny who had worked on underground steamlines and could endure much higher temperatures than the average man was feeling the heat. The explanation was simple. The hot springs water which normally drained out of the lateral tunnel was backing up. The ice walls and ceiling were melting much more rapidly of course. Otherwise, no living thing could survive. Melting ice was cooling the water to an extent.

Danny was explaining this to Kehoe when the man quietly fainted. Danny made his way to a wall, hacked out ice, crushed it, put it into a towel and applied it to the

man's head. Presently he opened his eyes, and began screaming. "Damn it, Kehoe!" Danny yelled. "Stop it!" He slapped him in the face with his open hand and Kehoe relaxed, muttering.

Hour after hour they sat there, watching the water rise, keeping their heads cool with ice packs, and feeling the increasing atmospheric pressure. The air now was like a dense fog. When Danny's watch told him it was morning, he switched the light off and on. Kehoe's frantic protests filled the chamber. "Don't turn off the light! I can't stand the darkness!" he screamed.

"I did that to let Brott know that I'm alive," Danny explained. "The answer will come in a couple of seconds." The lights went off three times. "There's his answer. As long as he is sure I'm alive, he's going to keep that generator feeding power to me. One more thing, if the light goes off it can mean either the generator has broken down, or else the powerline has been cut by the ice. In that case we'll turn on a flashlight."

Throughout that day and the next the pressure increased. The heat and cold had struck a balance. Danny could endure it as long as he relaxed. Kehoe passed out frequently and as frequently Danny revived him. "Why, I don't know," he thought. "I don't enjoy his company. He'd knife his best friend in the back if he thought it were necessary and could get away with it."

A lessening of atmospheric pressure and the movement of water awakened Danny the fourth day. Because of Kehoe's terror of darkness the lights were always burning. He could see the water was dropping rapidly. It meant one thing—pressure built up by the water backing up under the main ice sheet had finally fractured the ice dam.

He stripped off his clothing, caught up a shovel and began agitating the water wherever it contacted sand. He did it until he was almost too weak to stand, but he knew the water had carried off several tons of sand.

Relatively cool air rushed in as soon as the water was below the ceiling level where the lateral tunnel joined the main one. The pit was half filled with sand, but the size had been extensively increased.

A leg bone protruded from a bank, and he sluiced away the sand and carefully removed it. Sluicing the water against the area he gradually drained off the sand until the complete skeleton was in the clear. "Perfect!" he exclaimed. "As fine a Klawish skull as I've ever seen. Give me two or more like this one and I'll knock the hell out of Kehoe's case."

He continued to agitate the water with the shovel, his eyes as bright and hopeful as a miner's peering into a gold pan. Kehoe awakened, breathed deeply of the cool air, then he watched Danny.

Quietly, he slipped down from the ledge and looked at the skull which Danny had left at the water's edge. Kehoe's eyes slowly roved the immediate area. "You never can

tell about a killing," he thought. "Even when you're sure it's safe in a place like this, you've got to figure the body might be found. It's got to look like an accident, like a hunk of ice falling and fracturing a skull, say." He picked up the nearest piece of ice. It weighed twenty pounds and he held it above Danny's head as the latter bent to loosen another leg bone.

For several long seconds Kehoe hesitated, then he put the ice down and slowly backed off. He leaned against the ledge and said, "Hello! The dam must've let go."

"Hello," Danny answered, without looking up. "Yes, it let go during the night. I don't know whether we can get out or not. I'll take a look in four or five hours."

"Four or five hours!" Kehoe was stunned. "Why not right now?"

"There's a hell of a lot of water to be drained off. Every cave, tunnel and crevasse below water level was filled," Danny answered. "We've got to wait until it's drained off and the ice settled. Then we may worm our way out. It may be days yet. Let's eat. I could go for a little coffee. It's been so blasted hot here that I haven't wanted a hot drink."

He started the electric plate, melted ice and made coffee. He opened a tin of hash; another of grape fruit, and one of cream. "You're cook," he said. "I want to get this pump going again."

By the time breakfast was ready, the pump was clearing the pit of sand and water. Due to increased temperature, Danny had considerably more water to work with now. Even as he ate, he agitated sand and water with the shovel, always keeping it moving toward the pump intake.

Presently, exquisite ivory carvings began oozing from the sand. There were harpoon heads, then a woman's knife, which was something like the modern woman's "chopping knife" in the days when meat and vegetables were chopped in a wooden bowl. There were scores of ivory beads; dozens of birds, seals, whales and polar bears; an ivory model of the umiak or skin boat; and several dogs. The ivory sled came later, along with a figure of a man that could have been the driver.

"I've hit the jackpot," Danny thought.

Again Kehoe picked up a hunk of ice, grew thoughtful, then dropped it. Danny took a bucket and began tossing water against the sand. Under this deluge the sand began caving in rapidly. In a few minutes he had uncovered a chief's bones.

Ivory and bone alike had been stained a rich brown through the passage of time. He had collected nearly two hundred museum pieces within an hour. Now he leaned against the ledge and caught his breath. Perspiration was pouring from his body. "You fellows go nuts over stuff like that, don't you?" Kehoe asked. "It's so much junk to me."

"To us," Danny answered, "it is like turning the pages of a volume on history."

"Does it mean the Eskimos came down this far?" Kehoe asked.

"No. That is, they didn't live here," Danny answered. "This chief either raided Eskimo villages and ivory was part of the loot, or else it came down to him as gifts, or in exchange of goods. The complete lack of articles used by Whites is proof that the man was buried here before the Whites came. Had there been White implements or weapons, a man of this chief's importance would have been buried with some of them at least." Danny yawned and stretched. "I think I'll take a little shut-eye," he said.

Kehoe knew from the steady breathing that Danny had fallen asleep almost instantly. "The fool," he thought. "He hasn't the faintest idea I'm going to kill him, when I get around to it. He doesn't know that I blasted out an ice pillar to finish him off. I'd have missed on that. Queer it went off ahead of time. Pederson said I'd have a half hour before it let go. I had less'n a half minute. You don't suppose that dirty coyote tried to knock me off with Danny?" He gazed intently at the sleeping man, yet hardly saw him. "Why'd Pederson want to finish me? What would be his angle?"

Kehoe reviewed everything that had transpired in recent months. "Pederson is in this just as much as I am, though he won't get the dough out of it. Maybe that's it. He's in it, he's figured out that Reagan might be closing in. He's afraid I might talk, so he planned to get us both. If I get out of this it'll be just too bad for Pederson."

Kehoe looked at Danny, and once more he picked up a piece of ice, hesitated, and quietly put it down again. "I can't figure myself. He's a setting duck, but something always stops me," the man muttered. "I can't figure myself out. It's something I've got to lick." He stretched out, turned on his side to avoid the glare of the lights, and gradually relaxed. "I hope I don't talk in my sleep," he thought, "I hope I don't —" The thought became hazy and merged into darkness.

Kehoe suddenly awakened with a start, then felt better. The lights were on. He thought of coffee and food. He straightened up and looked around. Danny Reagan was not in sight. The pump had been shut off, Kehoe noticed. He sat up suddenly. "Reagan! Reagan!" he yelled. The name re-echoed hollowly. Sweat began pouring from Kehoe's face. "The dirty dog deserted me," he muttered.

Then he suddenly knew why he hadn't killed Danny Reagan. It was fear of being left alone. He caught up a flashlight and stumbled down the lateral tunnel. A new main tunnel was forming. Great ice masses supported the ceiling. The water surged around these masses and was melting them at their bases. In places the ceiling was six or eight feet above the stream, but there were points where the ceiling and water almost touched.

"He went downstream," Kehoe said. "But did he make it through?

Once you start there's no turning back. Suppose a man loses his footing and is sucked into a hole in the ice under water? He'd wedge there. He couldn't get back."

Kehoe hesitated, then he slowly stepped into the icy stream. It ranged in depth from one to four feet. Where the stream narrowed, the depth was greatest, the current swiftest.

He reached a low place and hesitated. Fear drove him on. He wallowed and drifted, his knees hitting bottom, his head striking ice, but he came through. There was ample ceiling the next one hundred feet, then ice and water met. At first he didn't see the rope secured to a hunk of ice. Danny had chipped a hole through a stranded piece, drove a rope through it and made a good knot. The rope vanished in the sand-burdened water. Its purpose was evident. Danny had planned to haul himself back to safety, hand over hand, if the water ahead proved a trap.

Kehoe pulled on the rope. It was sluggish, as if something waterlogged was attached to the other end. "Reagan's body maybe," Kehoe thought with a mixture of emotions. He hauled in twenty feet of line before it jammed. When he slacked away, the object drifted sluggishly with the current. "Body," he muttered. "I'm going back."

He bucked the current and fought his way to the lateral tunnel. He sat down in the pit and let the warm water drive the chill from his blood. He kept looking apprehensively about. His own shadow haunted him. He thought of old things and recent episodes and his thoughts weren't pleasant. When he moved, the shadows took on queer shapes. He remained rigid, conscious that what courage he possessed was slowly draining from him.

The lights went out suddenly and he shouted, "Where's that damned flashlight?" On hands and knees he scrambled over the ledge, groping for the flashlight. His hands touched everything but the article he needed most. He hurled cooking utensils and even canned goods aside. Then the lights went on and he found the flashlight.

"I'll never let it get out of my hand again," he whimpered.

The lights went off again, but he turned on the flashlight. He waited for the electricity to be turned on once more. But it remained off, and he sensed something was wrong with the generator. "This battery won't last forever. Then what?"

He knew, darkness, and his conscience remainding him of the smart moves that he had made. They didn't seem as smart here. And he had killed two men. He had always justified murder by telling himself it had been necessary to save his own life. He brushed aside the fact that in each case the men were defending their property against him.

There was a momentary glow of pride when he recalled the care he had taken to cover his tracks. In each instance, the authorities had concluded, or at least seemed to have

concluded, death was due to accident.

The flashlight was growing dimmer. The chips were really down now. He searched but found no fresh batteries or another flashlight. Fear of darkness drove him back to the stream, back to the rope, and into the swirling, smothering water that disappeared under the ice. He put the flashlight inside his shirt, but he left it switched on so that he could find it in case it slipped out. Then he grasped the rope, took a deep breath and went under. His hands slipped along the rope, and he felt the ice force him down almost to the bottom.

Just when it was growing difficult to hold his breath he boiled to the surface. His hands were against a chunk of ice fastened to the downstream end of the rope. Admiration for Danny Reagan's resourcefulness in testing the possibility of passage by floating a block of ice downstream came. It came grudgingly, but it came, nevertheless.

He could stand up now, and he breathed deeply several times, then stumbled downstream. There was one more low spot, and when he was clear he could see daylight ahead. It was blue daylight, showing through the ice, but he knew it was close. He took a deep breath and went under the last obstruction, and when he came out he saw a man waiting. "Here he is, Reagan!" the man shouted. "He made it through." Other men came over, helped him to a roaring fire, poured hot tea into his mouth and wrapped blankets about him.

"This winds up the glacier phase," Danny said, "unless someone wants to go back for the pump and other items."

"We'll write that off as necessary expense," Parker said.

Kehoe's old confidence returned with warmth, daylight and the voices of men. He was in the clear now and he grinned when Parker said, "We'll probably proceed with the hearing tomorrow, unless Reagan or Kehoe develop pneumonia."

IV.

When they were leaving the glacier, a freighter entered Glacier Cove and stirred the echoes with its deep whistle. "Well, there comes the advance guard of the construction gang that'll build a pulp mill and a city to go with it, Danny," Parker said.

"They're taking a chance," Kehoe predicted. "They haven't made a deal with the last of the Klucktans yet. I'll stop 'em cold until they do."

"Judge Morgan will settle that," Parker said, doing a little predicting on his own account. The steamer's deck was covered with lumber for a wharf, and bulldozers to clear a town site. There was no piling aboard, and he sensed that loggers would get the piling from the nearby forest.

"It may take a couple of years," Danny said, "but I can see the end of the paper shortage. Yes, and the end of trees that have been rotting for centuries."

"And I can see justice for the

Klucktans," Kehoe said evenly. "Hadn't we better get together? When that steamer headed north, your people, Mr. Parker, led with their chin."

"It isn't a glass chin," Parker answered. "It can take quite a wallop. Danny Reagan gave them the go-ahead signal before he even left Seattle."

He saw the color drain from Kehoe's cheeks and much of the man's confidence go with it. But he was again confident by the time Judge Morgan rapped for order.

"I'll call John Pederson to the stand," Parker said. When the man was in the witness chair, he continued, "You testified under oath you found this Klucktan skull in the ancient cemetery, I believe."

"That is right," Pederson answered. "That's where I dug it up. And Mr. Reagan identified it as a Klucktan skull."

"That's all," Parker said. "I'll call Danny Reagan to the stand." And when Danny was sworn in, he opened a large package and placed several skulls on the table. "Where did you find these skulls Mr. Reagan?"

"I excavated them from an ancient cemetery under a glacier at Glacier Cove," Danny answered. "These are Klawish skulls, proof that the true dwellers in this region were Klawish. Any anthropologist will support my testimony in this matter. Your honor can see the difference between the Klucktan skull, submitted in evidence by Mr. Kehoe, and these."

"Yes, there is a definite difference," Judge Morgan agreed. "And in view of it, I reject Mr. Kehoe's claim that the Klucktans have an ancient right to this region."

Mr. Parker betrayed no elation over the decision. He knew it was coming from the evidence, but he wasn't through. "Mr. Reagan," he said, "you testified that the skull Mr. Kehoe submitted was a Klucktan. Mr. Pederson testified he dug it up in a Klawish cemetery. Have you a theory on this?"

"Mr. Pederson committed perjury," Danny bluntly declared. There was a momentary uproar as Pederson and Kehoe began protesting.

"When I examined the skull," Danny continued, "a tiny bit of dirt fell from one of the eye sockets. I quietly analyzed the dirt and found it similar to the soil in which all Klucktan skulls are found. It runs heavy to a certain kind of clay. The soil in which the Klawish skulls are found runs heavily to black sand. Obviously, the skull submitted in evidence had been carefully planted. Perhaps cached is the better word. It was never buried."

Judge Morgan frowned. "Mr. Pederson," he said, "I shall have to detain you on the charge of perjury."

Pederson shot a quick glance at Kehoe, and the latter said, "I'll arrange bail in such amount as your honor deems adequate. In due time we will prove the skull was excavated from the ancient cemetery."

Danny leaned over to Parker. "Well, as far as your client is concerned, the way is clear," he whispered. "I'm going down and see the

plane people and arrange for space back to Seattle. I've some unfinished business down there. Then I want to classify the skulls and ivory I dredged out of the cemetery. I damned near drowned in my efforts to bring out the stuff. Later, I'll do a paper on the subject for the anthropologists. Perhaps, at some future time, I'll go under the ice again and see what else I can find."

"I'll go out with you," Parker told him. "Get me a reservation, too, if you can."

Danny put in a half hour at the plane ticket office and when he again saw Parker he reported, "All set for tomorrow morning."

During the evening he prowled the small community. It was full of the talk of the new pulp mills going in. Until the new town was established it would know prosperity. Later it would face a set-back, but, in the long run, the town would enjoy a measure of the general prosperity. Already the small hotels and rooming houses were crowded and strangers were finding rooms in private homes.

Danny was at the plane early the following morning. Parker joined him, then Kehoe arrived. He hadn't succeeded in raising bail for Pederson, and the man was still in jail. Kehoe nodded tersely at Danny and Parker, but made no effort to talk.

"He's a hard loser," Parker said.

When the plane arrived in Seattle, Danny was the first man off. He turned and waited for Kehoe. "You're wanted at headquarters, Kehoe," he said. "There's a detective bureau car waiting for you. How about it, will you take this quietly, or shall I slip on the handcuffs?"

"What's the charge?"

"Murder," Danny said. He tried to speak calmly, tried to remember he was a detective, but his face was white with fury and his lips trembled when he spoke. "You killed Dr. Carmody. And there hasn't been a moment when we were together that I haven't wanted to tear you apart. He was one of the finest men who ever lived, and you killed him with a harpoon."

"You're crazy," Kehoe said evenly. "I've no choice, I guess, so I might as well play with you until the farce is over. And I had a chance to kill you a dozen times."

"Yes, and I knew it," Danny answered. "I knew exactly what you were thinking and how you felt about me."

"You were dredging up evidence to beat me in court," Kehoe answered. "I could have killed you and blamed it on falling ice. But I didn't. Do you know why? Because I'm not a killer."

"I know why. You were afraid to be alone," Danny charged evenly. He motioned to waiting detectives. "Take this fellow away before I lose my self-control. I've been hanging onto it a long time and the bonds are wearing thin."

"If it's any of my business, Danny," Parker said, "I'd like to know how you suspected Kehoe?"

"He was playing for big stakes," Danny answered, "but I didn't think he'd go in for murder at the begin-

ning. I knew that Dr. Carmody couldn't possibly have fallen on that harpoon. So the answer was murder. I had a theory Dr. Carmody had caught someone in his house, and he had been murdered to silence him. You'll remember Carmody had talked at length about the early Alaskan natives. I made a recording at the time. Later I found the record shattered into countless bits. I blamed the maid for leaving my brief case in a chair, then sitting on it. She denied this, and I believed her. There could then be only one answer."

"I know someone with an interest in Carmody's expert testimony heard him making the record. They knew you had it, and destroyed it," Parker said.

"That's right. Kehoe was the man, and, damn him, he was in the house at the time and neither of us even dreamed of such a thing," Danny said. "If I'd only known. If I'd only known!"

"You couldn't have known, Danny," Parker told him. "What was the final thing that convinced you Kehoe was your man?"

"That fossil skull he submitted in evidence," Danny replied. "It was one of a dozen or so Klucktan skulls that Carmody had brought back on his last expedition. I recognized it the instant I saw it. I had handled it and studied it many times. Follow Pederson's and Kehoe's trials in the newspapers. Some interesting things will come out."

"What, for example?"

"After the roof fell in, I smelled powder fumes," Danny replied. "Obviously someone had touched off a blast to get me. But Kehoe was also caught. Either there was a slip in timing the charge or someone was double-crossing Kehoe. I'd already learned Pederson knew how to handle powder. You said that he left the scene shortly after the roof fell in."

"Yes. He said there was nothing he could do," Parker answered. "He returned several times. He was there when you came out, remember?"

"Yes, and I remember he sweat blood wondering whether Kehoe would make it. The man was on guard from the moment Kehoe came out," Danny said. "Here's what will happen. To save his own skin, Pederson will confess that he was given that skull by Kehoe. And to get even, Kehoe will accuse Pederson of planting a charge in the ice. In the long run, justice will win out as usual," Danny concluded. "Well, I'll see you again. I might as well clear up a few points and help justice all I can. Sometimes the old girl needs lots of help. And that, after all, is my business."

THE END.

Footloose and murder free!

BY HAL DEAN COOPER

A man's death means so little in the plan of daily living—to one person joy, to another blankness and misery.

INCHING my way over the top of the speeding freight train in the dank darkness of midnight was sheer torture. The icy wind tore at my face with its barbed fingers, screamed in my ears like a banshee. Using all the weight of my body and the power of my strong legs, I leaned at a sharp angle fighting its strength. It was as if a giant hand was trying to push me back from the horrible thing that I was about to do.

Mumbling to myself like a man possessed, I reached out with the three-foot brake club that I clutched in my right hand, and used it as a blind man does a cane. I found the end of the car, stopped. Stepping from car to car on the narrow catwalk wasn't my idea of pleasure; listening to the churning wheels click on the rail joints beneath me, reminded me of the many men who had fallen to their death during the ten years that I had been a brakeman. It was bad enough in the daytime, or at night with the aid of an electric lamp, but to try it in total darkness— Suddenly, as I started to step to the next car, I felt my feet surge to the right. I was flung off balance and fell backward to the catwalk. I was too weak to move.

Then I saw the flickering light from the firebox of the huge locomotive rounding a sharp curve. My muscles tensed. I knew that I had only a few minutes left to accomplish what I'd waited so long to do. Squinting my eyes, I tried to calculate how

far I was from my lamp that was secured in the catwalk, back in the middle of the train.

Getting to my feet, I moved on toward Bill's lamp. It was only two cars away. I had to move fast, or the whole plan would be derailed.

Stopping in the middle of the car, I studied the scene. Bill's lamp was secured in the catwalk by its handle, also. From the small, white arc of light, I saw that Bill was hunched against an upturned refer lid, using it as a windbreak. The black boomer hat was pulled low so that the glow from the lamp would be out of his eyes. I moved toward him softly, but he must have felt the pressure of my weight on the walk. He struggled to his feet, but I smashed the brake club down on the top of his head wth a sickening crunch. I struck him again and again, feeling the impact of the blows tingle up my arm like a jolt of electricity. Finally, I stopped, and stared at the lump of old clothes. For a moment, I felt a tinge of pity. Bill had been such a good friend at one time. Then I remembered Gloria, and I shoved the club under his body and, using it as a lever, rolled it off the car to the wheels below.

Icy sweat clung to my body as I climbed down the ladder to the bottom of the car. I heard the wheels click over the switch points at Ardmore, and fire began flying from the brake-shoes as the engineer drew off air, preparing to making a stop. As the train slowed down, I dropped to the ground and watched the cars roll by me. When the car with my lamp on it appeared, I caught the grab-irons and scrabbled up the ladder to the top, and grabbed my lamp as the train shuddered to a stop. I had made it with seconds to spare.

Back on the ground with my lamp in hand, so the rest of the crew would swear that they saw me crawl off my cut when the train had stopped, I waited for the signals.

I jumped as the stillness of the night was jarred by a shrill blast from the engine's whistle. Then I remembered that the engineer was calling for an air test from the rear brakeman. I heard the air rumbling through the train line and the creaking of the brake-shoes as they set up. The whistle blarred two more times announcing that the test was O. K. I returned to the top of the train and as the air released, I flipped up the retaining valves on each car.

When I reached Bill's lamp in the catwalk, I grabbed it and scrambled back to the ground and waved my lamp displaying violent stop signals. The engineer answered me with a perturbed jerk of the whistle cord. Looking back toward the caboose I saw two lamps moving in my direction. I ran toward the lights.

On reaching the two lamps, I stopped and tried to regain my wind. I held up Bill's lamp, then gasped, "Jim, Bill's not on the train. I found his lamp in the catwalk, but he isn't on the train, anywhere!" Jim is my conductor, and his blue eyes squinted at me, his florid face twisted in worry, as he snapped, "When did you see him last, Eddie?" I answered, "In the beanery at Colton. We kidded back

and forth about staying out of the vents going over the mountains. Then he left and started down his part of the train to lace up the air. And when the train left town, I saw him catch his cut and relay the highball to the engineer. Then for the ride up the hill, I saw his light several times as we went around curves."

Jim turned and mumbled more to himself than to the other brakeman and myself, "There's only one thing to do. Call the dispatcher and have him send someone out looking for him." Jim stopped suddenly, turned and addressed me. His voice was strained, "I know how you feel, Eddie. You and him being pals. Can you finish the trip? Take over Bill's cut down the hill?" For an answer, I handed Bill's lamp to the brakeman and started for the head-end to take over both portions for the ride down the hill.

It was late the next day and long fingers of shadows from the San Jacinto mountains crept over the desert town of Indio. Walking out of the trainmaster's office with my conductor and crew, I felt a joy that is hard to describe. Bill had been found and was tentatively identified by the watch and papers in the wallet that was on what was left of the body. The coroner's inquest, and the railroad's investigation both agreed that it was "another unfortunate railroad accident." I caught the *Californian* at five-ten and dead-headed home, home to Gloria, my wife.

Gloria was taking the news of Bill's death hard. She tried not to show it, but by looking deep into her blue eyes, and from what I'd seen that night a year ago, when I'd returned home unexpectedly, I knew she was hurt. What I'd seen that night still left a bad taste in my mouth. I had entered the back way and had happened to look in the window. I saw Bill kissing Gloria. I was stunned and hurt at the same time. Bill and I had been braking partners for years, and we put in twenty-seven months with the Railroad Battalion overseas. When I'd met and married Gloria, Bill still dropped over to the house for dinner whenever he could. I slipped away from my home that night without either of them seeing me. At first, I thought of divorce. Let Bill have her. But it wasn't that easy; Gloria was in my blood. I couldn't get her out of my mind. I knew that the only way, was to get rid of Bill.

Suddenly, my attention was snapped back to the present, as I heard Gloria's voice. I moved over to the couch where she was staring at nothing. She mumbled, "What a horrible way to die. What a—" She suddenly turned her small, elfish face toward me, and pulled me toward her. Her voice was near-hysteria. "Oh, Eddie. It might have been you!" I kissed her neck and whispered that I would watch my step and told her of the old-timers who had put in over thirty years without getting a scratch. She finally accepted the fact that it was just as dangerous to cross the street of any big city, and that fate was the one that decided our life span.

For the next few weeks, the railroad kept me busy. The perishables

were moving East and I found myself back on duty after eight hours' rest. Gloria proved herself to be an excellent railroad wife, as she could whip up a meal in jig time. And she saw that I wasn't disturbed while sleeping in the daytime. Regardless of the hours I was working, I never felt better in my life. For the first time, I felt that Gloria was mine.

One night after working fifteen hours on a run from Bakersfield, I returned home, tired and hungry. Being dirty and unshaven, I entered the backway. As I walked into the kitchen, I heard voices and the radio playing in the front room. I pushed open the swinging door that led into the dining room, and started to call out, but I stopped dead in my stride. The radio was on rather loud, so my entrance had not been heard. A red mist filmed my vision, blood pounded in my temples, and I was speechless as I stared at what my eyes failed to believe. It wasn't possible. I must have suddenly gone raving mad, for there was Bill on the couch kissing Gloria!

I don't clearly remember what took place after that. It all seems like a nightmare, now, but I do remember, screaming, "Damn it, you're dead . . . dead—" I can still see their white, pinched faces, contorted with fear, as I raved at them like a mad man. Then, I ran to my room and grabbed my .38 out of the bureau drawer. Bill was frantically trying to get out the front door, as I ran out of the bedroom. I whipped the revolver in Bill's direction, squeezed the trigger and the hall was filled with gun shots, smoke, and screams. Then I heard the sharp clicking of the hammer striking the dead shells. The gun dropped from my leaden fingers with a harsh clatter. I moved toward Bill huddled on the floor. Blood was seeping into the green carpet. Gloria was lying in the doorway of the front room. I saw no blood, and guessed she had fainted. Somehow, I didn't care if she were dead or alive. I moved to the phone on my desk, lifted the receiver and dialed 116. I told the operator to get me the police.

I remember now, as I sit in this cell, the night Gloria and I talked about fate. Brother, she sure handed me a load. It all came out in my trial. It wasn't Bill that I'd killed that night. Leaving Colton, a hobo sneaked up on Bill and sapped him. He took his coat, hat, and wallet and threw Bill off the train. At that particular place the train was going over a bridge, and Bill landed in the soft sandy river bottom. Bill was found by a hobo, who finding him bare of identification, figured he was another bo who had fallen off a train. When Bill remained consciousness, he didn't remember a thing. He had temporary amnesia. He lived in the hobo jungle for a week or two, then one morning he regained his memory. The rest you know, except, that Bill was only wounded from my shooting him. I was charged with the murder of the hobo who robbed Bill, and was given a life sentence. So, now, while I rot in stir, Bill and Gloria are happily married.

THE END

Deadly

nightshade

BY RONALD HENDERSON

He was an expert chess player and, even after his death, he still controlled the moves of too many people's lives—

THE ORCHESTRA was playing "Strawberry Blonde" in honor of Cynthia Wales, who was giving the party. The overhead lights in the Lakeside Pavilion were blacked out and a spotlight flickered around the hall, lingering tantalizingly on couples dancing cheek to cheek. Some couples swayed on, their eyes closed, as oblivious to the glaring light of publicity as though they were embracing on some remote part of the beach; others guiltily assumed a more conventional dancing stance until they had stepped out of the white aura of exposure and blended into the shapeless shadows surrounding them. A light breeze swept through the open-air pavilion and small waves slapped pleasantly on the beach outside.

It was a hell of a night for a murder.

The orchestra stopped on a lin-

gering note and the lights flooded the hall. Couples reluctantly disentangled themselves and walked off the floor.

Cynthia Wales spotted me standing by the door, said something to her partner. I groaned as I saw that her partner was Niles Trammell. If his quick-tempered wife, Mollie, had come to the party there would be fireworks. She had publicly warned Cynthia to stay away from Niles. He smiled at me sheepishly, patted Cynthia on the shoulder, and headed for the bar.

Cynthia walked toward me, making every step a swaying motion, deliberately calculated to catch the roving eye of any man. Her black, strapless evening gown clung to her lush body like a coat of shiny paint. If she had ever been operated on for appendicitis, the mark of the incision would have stood out like a mountain ridge on a relief map. Cynthia Wales could look more indecent dressed up than most women would look nude.

She placed her hand on my arm, squeezed tightly. With any other woman, the act would have been an intimate gesture with a world of meaning. With Cynthia, it was something she did automatically with every man.

She smiled up at me. "I'm glad you could come, Ken. This is a big night in my life."

I feigned surprise. "I didn't think women considered their fortieth birthday worth celebrating."

The smile left her face and for a brief moment I caught a flash of fire in her eyes. She quickly recovered, showed her perfect teeth in a wide smile. "Still the hard-bitten woman-hater, eh? Only a charming policeman could insult a woman like that and get away with it."

Cynthia was laying it on thick. There is nothing charming about a lanky, red-headed state trooper with the hamlike, freckled paws of a farm hand and feet that refuse to take the right steps on a dance floor. As far as being a woman-hater is concerned—well, I've had my moments. But Cynthia could never be one of them. I prefer my women with a little innate modesty instead of the blatant, here-I-am-come-and-get-me type.

"It's no secret, is it?" I asked evenly. "Everyone knows that you are giving this party in celebration of your birthday."

"The birthday is incidental and you know it," she pouted. "The party is in celebration of something much more important. I had hoped people would be charitable about the birthday part."

I nodded cynically. "You've waited a long time, Cynthia. It must have been a struggle."

Her eyes narrowed in anger, then resumed their artificial gaiety.

"How long has it been?" I continued. "Five years?"

She nodded a little grimly. "Five long years."

Five years ago, Cynthia's husband, John Wales, had given up the ghost after being married to Cynthia for less than a year. They had been an ill-assorted couple, he crowding

seventy, while Cynthia was a gay thirty-five. I had known John Wales well. In fact, it had been through his influence, plus a little hard work on my part, that I had got the appointment as captain for the district. He had been an old man with an unusually sour sense of humor; cynical and bitter, with a waspish temper. His chief pleasure in life had been chess, at which he was an expert, and it was probably because of our mutual love of the game that he liked me. I sometimes thought that John Wales ruled his life like he played chess; thinking far ahead of every move.

He had quickly learned that Cynthia was only interested in his money and had taken a peculiar pleasure in keeping her down. He had died suddenly from strychnine poisoning and the verdict had been suicide. Knowing John Wales as I did, I had never believed that he had taken his life, and had done some quiet investigating on my own. I had discovered that Cynthia had been secretly seeing Phil Orcutt, an in-and-out lawyer in the town, but there had been no evidence that Cynthia had hastened her husband's death. She had been away for two days at the time.

The old man had carried his sour sense of humor to the grave. Cynthia was the sole beneficiary of his will, but his fortune was in trust for five years and she was to inherit the money only if she didn't remarry in the meantime and provided no scandal attached itself to her name. The crowning touch to the old man's cynicism was naming Phil Orcutt the administrator of his estate. Cynthia, for some unknown reason, had promptly dropped Orcutt and he had eventually married an unknown, sullen-eyed, vitally intense woman who hated Cynthia with a deep, jungle-like ferocity.

"It must have been a struggle," I repeated.

Her hard mouth twisted, but she said nothing. She knew I was referring to her five-year battle to keep the smell of scandal from her name. There had been much gossip about her but nothing tangible. Cynthia could no more keep away from men than a starving cat could remain hungry in an unguarded fish market. But she was smart. She picked discreet men, married men.

I looked around at the crowd standing along the sides of the pavilion. Some of them were watching us openly, others covertly. There was a suppressed feeling of excitement in the hall.

I turned back to Cynthia. She was thoroughly enjoying being the center of attraction. "You didn't invite me to your party because you like the way I dance," I stated flatly. "You had a purpose."

She smiled up at me and nodded. "I am going to tell you something tonight that you have been trying for five years to find out."

I looked at her sharply. There was only one thing that I had been trying to find out for five years as far as Cynthia was concerned. "Something about John?"

She smiled enigmatically.

I started to question her further, but Phil Orcutt stepped out of the bar, walked over to us. He was a big man, suave and smooth as polished oak. The kind of man that women go for and the kind of man who knows it. He nodded to me and smiled confidently at Cynthia. "Thanks for asking me to your party, Cynthia."

Her lip curled just a trifle. "I asked everybody." The way she said it could have included the town halfwit.

Phil Orcutt flushed clear up to his receding hairline.

"And anyway," Cynthia continued coldly, "I have an announcement to make to Ken Duncan. Being the family lawyer, you will want to be here."

Orcutt looked at me sharply. He turned quickly on Cynthia. "Announcement?"

At that moment, Helen Orcutt came out of the bar. Her searching eyes swept up and down the pavilion. They finally rested on the three of us standing by the door. She stepped over, slipped her arm through her husband's.

Helen Orcutt had always been something of a mystery to me. She was not a local girl and how Phil Orcutt had happened to meet her and why he had married her was something no one knew. He had left town for a month, shortly after John Wales' death, and had returned with his bride. She was an awkward, flat-chested girl, who kept to herself and seemed to be constantly brooding about something. Definitely not Phil Orcutt's type.

The hum of conversation in the hall stopped as abruptly as though the curtain were being raised on a play. I was acutely conscious of the eyes watching us in the doorway. I felt suddenly embarrassed and a little angry.

Cynthia tilted her head up, smiled down her nose at Helen Orcutt. "Hello, my dear." Her voice dripped the poisoned honey that women assume with women they hate. "Keeping tabs on dear old Phil?" She laughed, a little louder than necessary. "You needn't bother. He's gone by, poor boy. A few years ago"—she waved her hand.

Someone in a group to one side snickered. Helen Orcutt stiffened and her jaw hardened. She was a big-boned, lean woman, as tough as a rawhide thong. She was being baited and she knew it. For a minute I thought she would claw Cynthia's eyes out, and I could hardly blame her. Most women can take a lot, but few can take ridicule. I have seen hate in a person's face, but Helen Orcutt's dark, intense eyes blazed with venom.

Phil Orcutt was no longer easily confident. His lower lip was trembling as he grabbed Helen's arm and hurried her toward the bar. The sound of Cynthia's mocking laughter seemed to make him move faster.

The orchestra started tuning up for the next dance and the crowd relaxed. They had had their moment of fun.

I turned to Cynthia, shook my head. "Some day," I said, "you will go too far."

She sniffed. "Not with that brood-

ing zombie nor her scheming husband."

I thought, then, of the man she had been dancing with when I came in. "How about Niles Trammell? Molly doesn't take time to brood. She acts first. I hope she doesn't come to your party."

Cynthia shrugged her well-padded shoulders, turned to watch the first couples dancing into the middle of the floor.

"You told me you were going to make an announcement," I reminded her.

She waved her hand. "All in good time. Don't be impatient." She kept looking around the big hall, spotted my sister, Alice, as she came out of the bar with young Dave Malcolm.

Dave's eyes were a little too bright, his smile a little too fixed. He walked with the exaggerated confidence of a man who has had too many Martinis. Alice had the worried look a woman has when the man she loves has taken too many and I cursed young Malcolm for a fool.

Cynthia rushed over to them just as Dave started to put his arm around Alice. She placed her hand on his arm. "I was beginning to think you had forgotten me," she smiled. "I promised you this dance, remember?"

Dave smiled foolishly at Alice and before he knew it he was guiding Cynthia onto the floor.

Alice stood there stiff as a ramrod, and I watched her hands clench at her sides. I stepped up behind her. "Having fun, sis?"

She turned on me suddenly. "No, I'm not," she snapped. Her eyes were smarting.

I patted her shoulder. "Take it easy."

She smiled up at me then. "I'm sorry, Ken. But—" She stopped short, shrugged. "What's the use?"

"You think a lot of Dave Malcolm, don't you?"

"I love him," she said simply.

Dave and Alice worked in the same office. She had been Phil Orcutt's secretary ever since getting out of high school two years ago. Dave had gone to work in Orcutt's office after graduating from law school. He was a nice kid, honest and sincere, and he had told me that he wanted to marry Alice as soon as he had his feet on the ground. I was all for him and happy for Alice.

"Don't take his drinking too seriously," I told her. "Dave isn't the drinking type. He'll be around like a little puppy tomorrow."

Alice looked at me earnestly. "That isn't what's bothering me, Ken. It's Cynthia Wales."

I looked deep into her eyes. There was a worried look in them that hurt me to see. "You can't mean it," I protested. "Not Cynthia. You're not jealous of Cynthia." I laughed. "Good Lord, sis, she can't hold a candle to you. Why, you've got everything that Cynthia hasn't got. Youth, good looks, and character. Dave has too much common sense—"

"It's not that," she broke in impatiently. "But she has been seeing altogether too much of Dave lately, and she's seeing him for a purpose. She has been pumping him about

something. He won't tell me what. He claims it's a client's secret, but I'm worried."

I knew about Cynthia's sudden rushing of Dave Malcolm. The whole town knew about it and there had been some talk. At first, I hadn't paid too much attention to it. I had hoped that it would end quickly and be forgotten. I didn't like to approach Dave personally about it. If he hadn't been engaged to my sister, I would have had a talk with him at once, but I didn't like to assume the attitude of a protecting, outraged brother. I decided, now, that it had gone far enough. As soon as I got Dave alone, I would tell him.

The fact that Cynthia was pumping Dave interested me. "What do you suppose she wants from him?"

Alice shrugged helplessly. "I can't imagine, unless it's something connected with her estate. Phil Orcutt handles the business, you know."

I thought this over for a minute, then shook my head. I was inclined to think it was something else. After all, Cynthia was coming into her money tomorrow. Why should she be pumping Dave about it? And, anyway, if she wanted information, all she had to do was to ask Phil Orcutt. He would have to tell her.

The couples on the floor suddenly stopped dancing. They had formed a huddled circle in the center of the floor. A woman's angry voice rose above the muted strains of the orchestra. I stepped quickly onto the floor, parted the people huddled together. In the center of the ring, Cynthia stood looking contemptuously at the woman confronting her. The woman was Molly Trammell. I had been afraid of this. Molly's eyes were flashing fire. Her clean-limbed, young body was as tight as a coiled spring. She called Cynthia a name. Cynthia regarded her as though she were a particularly revolting snake.

"No wonder your husband can't stand you," she spat out.

I grabbed Molly just as she started to rush Cynthia. A murmur of regret swept through the crowd. I jerked my head at Dave Malcolm, who was standing helplessly to one side. He grabbed Cynthia's arm, led her off the floor.

The sharp anger had left Molly as quickly as it had come. I had known her ever since we were kids in school. Quick to flare up, but fiercely loyal to the people she loved. "I'm sorry, Ken," she apologized. "But I can't stand that woman. Someday I'll—"

"Don't say it," I said.

I guided her through the curious crowd and out the door of the pavilion. We stood there on the beach while I tried to talk some sense into her. She agreed with everything I told her, a little too readily, I thought. She finally said she thought a stroll by herself in the cool breeze would straighten her out. I agreed and shook my head as I watched her walk down the beach.

Dave and Cynthia were sitting on the veranda sipping drinks. I was itching to get Dave alone for a few minutes, but I would have to wait

until Cynthia left him. I looked around for Alice, but I couldn't see her in the crowd. I turned back to Dave and Cynthia, saw a waiter hand Cynthia a piece of paper. She looked at it, slipped it into her bag and said something to Dave. He nodded and stood up. She smiled sweetly and left in the direction of the bar.

Dave weaved over to another table and engaged in conversation with a young couple sitting there.

I drifted around the pavilion looking for Alice. I finally went into the bar, got buttonholed by Judge Thomas. He was in a talkative mood and rambled on endlessly. Finally, someone else spoke to him and I grasped the opportunity to get away from him.

I spotted Alice standing by one of the pillars. To my surprise she was talking with Helen Orcutt. I stepped up behind them, was about to touch Alice on the arm when I heard something that made me stop.

Helen was talking rapidly. "It's a disgrace the way that woman runs after all the men. She has no shame. I overheard her asking Dave Malcolm to meet her at her cabin. Something should be done—"

I slipped away, headed for the veranda where I had last seen Dave. The couple he had been talking with were still there, but Dave was not with them.

"Have you seen Dave Malcolm?" I asked.

The young man answered. "He was here about ten minutes ago but he left." He smiled. "Guess he needed some fresh air."

I thanked him and stepped back into the pavilion. I was beginning to get a little worried. Dave was not himself. I didn't want him doing anything that would cause trouble with Alice.

I stuck my head in the bar on the assumption that a man who has had too much to drink doesn't know enough to stop. He wasn't there but Judge Thomas was and he nabbed me again. I tried to get away from him but it was useless. He held me firmly by the arm and insisted that I have a drink with him. I sat down at a table with him and tried to appear cheerful. Judge Thomas is quite a power in our town and, being trooper for the district, I couldn't very well leave him.

I have no idea what he talked about but it must have been twenty minutes before I had a chance to get away. I headed straight for the door and the beach. I was rushing down the steps when I ran right into Alice and Dave. She was holding him by the arm. He had the woebegone look of a sick spaniel.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

Dave just looked at me, shook his head weakly.

I looked at Alice. Her lips were drawn in a straight line and her eyes had a harried look in them.

"What's happened?" I asked sharply.

She appeared numb, unable to speak. Looking at her closely, I saw terror in her eyes. My gaze shifted

down the beach to Cynthia Wales' cabin, swerved back to Alice and Dave.

I grabbed Dave by the shoulder, shook him hard. "Tell me, man."

His eyes were no longer glassy. He was as cold sober as a Tibetan monk. "She's dead," he blurted out.

He didn't have to tell me who he meant. "How?" I asked sharply.

Alice found her voice. "I went to her cabin, looking for Dave." She spoke in a dreary monotone, like a person in a trance. "I stepped in the door and she was laying on the floor." Her voice started to rise with a hysterical note. "There were ugly marks on her throat. Her tongue was hanging out. Her eyes were popping." She started to sob brokenly.

Dave was serious now. He placed his arm around Alice's shoulders. "Take it easy, sweetheart," he comforted.

"How about you, Dave?"

He shook his head. "Cynthia asked me to meet her at her cabin. She claimed she had something important to tell me." He grimaced wryly. "If I'd had my brains about me, I wouldn't have gone. Anyway, when I stepped in the door, someone bashed me on the head." He shrugged. "I came to on the bed. Alice was shaking me."

I didn't have time to think things out calmly. Dave and Alice were in a spot. I had no doubt but what someone had seen both of them heading for Cynthia's cabin.

"Go into the pavilion," I ordered, "and for Heaven's sake try and act normal. I'll be back in a few minutes."

I hurried down the beach to Cynthia's cabin. The lights were on, but the shades were drawn. Three stone steps led onto a screened porch. Just as I started to walk up the steps, I saw a blurred form, darker than the evergreens, dodge around the far end of the cabin. I made the corner of the cabin in three strides. The blurred form was huddled over, dodging through the pines, in the direction of the pavilion. It was a woman. The trees blacked out the moon and I couldn't be sure, but the fleeing woman looked like Molly Trammell. I turned back.

The porch was in darkness. I opened the door of the cabin, stood there for a moment. The place was as silent as a mausoleum. The soft sighing of the breeze, as it swept through the pines, seemed to come from a great distance.

Cynthia was lying on the floor in front of the pine-paneled fireplace. One arm was thrown up as though in defense. I knelt beside her. In death, she was not so beautiful. The violence of her death brought out all the harsh lines of her face that she had managed to camouflage when alive. The bruises on her white throat were livid, angry-looking. The murderer had been viciously purposeful.

In a way, I couldn't help feeling sorry for her. She had been so cocksure of herself, so contemptuous of what other people thought of her.

Cynthia's murder was going to

look bad for a lot of people. So many had a motive, especially women. General suspicion would attach itself first to Molly Trammell. She had the temper for it and people had killed with lesser motives. Then there was Helen Orcutt. She had publicly been a victim of Cynthia's scorn. But the chief suspicion would eventually rest on Alice. She had gone to the cabin, looking for Dave. It would be hard proving that she hadn't killed Cynthia in a moment of jealousy.

But I couldn't picture the killing as a spur-of-the-moment affair, which it would have to be if Molly Trammell or Helen Orcutt had done it, unless it was taken into account that either one of them might have brooded about their wrongs and decided to do something about it.

I turned suddenly as I heard footsteps on the doorstep. Phil Orcutt and his wife Helen stepped into the cabin. They stopped in the doorway as they saw me standing by Cynthia's form. Phil's eyes shifted to Cynthia then back to me. Helen merely stood, frozen.

"What's happened?" Phil asked.

I stepped toward them. "What are you doing here?"

Phil lifted his hands. "Cynthia asked us to come. She said she wanted to go over certain matters with Dave Malcolm and me." His eyes searched the room behind me. "Where is Dave?"

"Dave isn't here," I said.

"But he was here," Phil protested. "I saw him come down the beach some time ago." His eyes shifted again to Cynthia. "What has happened to Cynthia? Is she sick?"

"Cynthia is dead."

Helen's eyes had never left the form of the woman she hated. Even now, after my announcement, her face did not change expression.

My mind had been going over the events of the evening. Suddenly, I remembered the waiter giving Cynthia the note. I stooped down, picked up Cynthia's bag. I dumped the contents on a table. Just about everything a woman carries in a bag tumbled out, but no note. I searched the two little pockets on either side of the bag, but they were empty. I smiled as I returned the contents back into the bag. It had been no spur-of-the-moment killing. The murderer had made sure she would go to the cabin and then had taken the note out of her bag.

Phil Orcutt watched me closely. "What are you looking for?" he asked.

"Nothing important," I answered. I took a blanket off the bed, covered Cynthia's body. I turned to Orcutt and his wife. "Let's get back to the pavilion."

Dave and Alice were sitting at a table on the veranda. I just shook my head as they looked up sharply. The stage at the front of the pavilion was deserted. It was intermission.

The crowd at the tables were strangely silent as though sensing something in the air, like a dog that smells death. I made a quick look around, couldn't see Molly Tram-

mell. I had an idea she was keeping out of sight as much as possible.

I left Phil Orcutt and his wife on the veranda, stepped into the bar. I picked up the telephone and asked the operator to get me Doc Gendron. He acts as our coroner. He was out on a sick call, but his wife expected him back any minute. I asked her to have him call me as soon as he got in. He called two beers and twenty minutes later. I told him what had happened. He sounded irritated as he told me he would be along in about an hour.

While I had talked, the hum of conversation in the bar had stopped. Judge Thomas rushed up to me. "She's dead?"

I nodded. "Murdered," I answered

He grabbed my arm. "Who did it?"

I shrugged. "I don't know for sure just yet, but I will in a few minutes." I told the barman that I wanted to see the waiters, all of them.

In a few minutes they trooped in. There were three but none of them was the man I had seen give the note to Cynthia. I turned back to the barman. "How many waiters were working tonight?"

"Four," he answered. He turned to the men lined up in front of the bar. "Where's Charlie?" he asked. "Tell him we want him right away."

The waiters looked at each other. Finally, one of them spoke. "I haven't seen Charlie for the last half hour."

The bartender addressed the waiter who had spoken. "Go down to the locker room and see if he's there."

The man started to leave, but I stopped him. I didn't want anyone around when I questioned Charlie. "I'll get him," I said. At the door, I turned. "I'll be back in a minute."

The locker room was downstairs, under the bar. A row of steel lockers lined one side of the narrow room. A couple of wooden benches, clothing draped over them, were in front of the lockers. Charlie wasn't in sight.

The end locker was the only one that was closed. I was afraid that Charlie had left. I grasped the handle. If his clothes were gone, I would have to put out a search for him, which would mean a considerable delay. The door stuck and I had to yank it hard to open it. Charlie's clothes were there, but they weren't hanging on the hook. They were on Charlie. He had been wedged into the narrow locker, upright. His lax knees were propped against one side of the locker. I grasped his shoulder, pulled him half out. Charlie was dead, throttled as effectively as Cynthia Wales.

His body was warm. He hadn't been dead very long. I stretched him out on the floor, covered his head with an apron. I felt a little squeamish in the pit of my stomach. Cynthia's killing had been bad enough, but in a way she had asked for it. The murder of this waiter had been wanton, coldly impersonal, to keep him quiet. I was filled with a bitter desire to run the murderer down; a

desire that didn't spring from professional duty. I released the spring lock on the door, snapped it shut.

Dave and Alice were still sitting at the table on the veranda. The rest of the crowd were milling about on the floor. Alice looked up at me expectantly as I stepped up to their table.

"Nothing yet," I said. "But something is going to pop soon. One of the waiters has also been murdered."

Dave looked at me sharply. "Why?"

I shrugged, lit a cigarette. After taking a couple of puffs, I leaned over, looked him square in the eye. "Why was Cynthia taking up so much of your time?"

He hunched his shoulders. "She was pumping me for information about Helen Orcutt."

I stiffened. "Helen Orcutt? What did she want to know about Helen?"

"She had found out that Helen was a distant cousin of old John Wales. How she found out, I don't know. But it bothered her for some reason. I think she believed that Phil Orcutt had located Helen after John Wales died and married her for reasons other than love. She seemed obsessed with the idea that Phil was trying to get his hands on her money."

I mulled this over. It was certainly true that no one had known Helen Orcutt's background, and Phil Orcutt had been surprisingly hasty in marrying her.

If Helen were related to old John, she would be the logical heir in the event of Cynthia's death. Cynthia had no other relatives that I knew of. Still, I couldn't see why this would have bothered Cynthia. She had lived up to the terms of the will. No scandal had been attached to her name in the five years since John Wales had died. She had lived a more or less exemplary life, as far as anyone knew, since she had cut off from Phil Orcutt. Phil Orcutt! He could cause a scandal if he wanted to badly enough. They had been pretty thick and I had no doubt but what Orcutt had evidence of it in the form of letters or something. Still, if Orcutt had planned to expose her, there would be no point in killing her.

I remembered Cynthia's telling me that she was going to make an announcement. I began to have a sneaking suspicion as to what that announcement would have been.

I looked up to see Niles Trammell and his wife, Molly, step onto the veranda from the beach. Molly gave me a startled look, then averted her eyes. I beckoned to Trammell and he guided Molly reluctantly toward us.

"I want you to come with me into the bar," I told them. I motioned to Dave and Alice. "You, too."

Judge Thomas and the rest of the crowd were still there and Phil Orcutt and Helen were seated at a small table.

I addressed the bartender. "I want everyone out of this room except Judge Thomas and Phil Orcutt and his wife." I motioned to Trammell and Molly, Dave and Alice. "And these people," I added.

The bartender looked up, surprised, saw that I mean it and shrugged. "All right, folks," he said. "You heard him. Everyone out."

Phil Orcutt pushed to his feet. "What's the meaning of this?"

I waved him back into his chair. "I know the murderer," I said shortly.

When the room had been cleared, I turned to Judge Thomas. "Practically everyone here tonight, especially the women, could have killed Cynthia."

The judge nodded slowly.

"But the three women in this room," I continued, "had an immediate motive." I looked at Helen Orcutt. "Helen was publicly ridiculed by Cynthia a short time ago. Aside from that, there has been bad blood between them for a long time." Helen started to protest, but I waved her to silence. "Molly Trammell had words with Cynthia on the floor about Niles. It's common knowledge that she had threatened Cynthia." Molly stared at the floor like a frightened schoolgirl. Niles sheepishly averted his gaze.

I addressed Molly. "What were you doing at Cynthia's cabin tonight, Molly?"

She looked up at me, a half-defiant expression chasing the frightened look out of her eyes. "I went there to talk with Cynthia. I wanted to put an end to her chasing after Niles. I peeked through the window to see if she was alone and saw her lying by the fireplace. I knew, somehow, that she was dead. When you came along I got panicky and ran."

I nodded. "We'll come back to that."

I turned to Alice. "My own sister probably had as much motive as any of the women. Cynthia had been rushing Dave for some time, as you know."

The judge made a deprecating gesture.

"Aside from that," I continued, "Alice was in the cabin where Cynthia was murdered, at the time or shortly after the killing." I smiled at Helen Orcutt. "Alice went there to look for Dave. She had been told that you had overheard Cynthia ask Dave to meet her at the cabin."

Helen Orcutt's face whitened.

"Why did you tell Alice that Cynthia asked Dave to meet her at the cabin?" I pressed.

Helen stammered. "Why . . . why . . . I thought it was only right."

"Then why didn't you also tell her that Cynthia had asked Phil and you to meet her there with Dave? Why did you try to make it appear as though it were a secret meeting?"

Helen looked at her husband. He stood up. "Now look here, Duncan. I won't have my wife badgered like this."

I ignored him, leveled my finger at Helen. "Isn't it a fact that you wanted to plant Alice at the cabin so that she would be suspected of murder, a murder that you had committed?"

Helen Orcutt's jaw dropped. She looked at her husband in panic. His eyes narrowed as he watched me make the accusation. He grasped

Helen's hand. "You can't get away with this, Duncan. Are you going to accuse her of killing the waiter also?"

I grinned as the judge looked his amazement. "How do you know the waiter was killed, Orcutt? I haven't made any announcement."

Orcutt was a cool customer. "Anyone could tell after looking at your face when you came up from the locker room that something was wrong."

I nodded. "We'll let that pass. But aside from any other motive, Helen had a better one. She is now the sole heir to John Wale's money. Why have you kept silent about that all this time?"

Orcutt and his wife looked at me in dismay. I turned to the judge. "I'm going to take Helen Orcutt in on a charge of murder. And I'll make it stick," I added grimly.

She jumped to her feet. Her eyes were wild with fear. "No, no! I didn't do it." She looked wildly around her, then, "It was Phil," she said desperately. "He had to kill her. She was going to expose him as the man who killed John Wales. He talked me into getting Alice over to the cabin. He—"

Phil Orcutt had jumped up, grabbed her by the mouth. She fought back like a mad cat. "Leave me alone!" she snarled. "You would let me go to jail to get out of it. I'm going to tell everything I know."

Phil Orcutt whirled, his hand reaching for his hip pocket. I had been watching him closely, jumped him before he could get the gun out.

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Dave Malcolm rushed over, helped me hold him while I manacled his wrists.

Helen sobbed out the whole sordid story. A couple of days after John Wales' death, she had received a letter from him telling her that she was a relative of his and advising her to write to Phil Orcutt. She had written Orcutt and he had visited her. He had told her that Cynthia had inherited John Wales' money and shortly after, had asked her to marry him. Some time later, she had discovered that her husband had murdered John Wales. Cynthia had told her in a fit of anger. She realized, then, that the scheming Orcutt had married her only because she was a potential heir. She felt that Cynthia had cheated her out of money that was rightfully hers. She readily fell in with Orcutt's scheme to murder the woman she hated, especially when Cynthia refused to be blackmailed by Orcutt's threats to publish letters she had written him and cause a scandal. Cynthia had gone him one better and told him she was going to denounce him as the murderer of John Wales.

Judge Thomas looked at me when she had finished. "Well, Ken," he said. "You guessed wrong, but it all turned out right."

I shook my head. "I didn't guess wrong. I knew Phil Orcutt was the murderer and I guessed that Helen had been a willing helper. But I could never have pinned it on Orcutt. I had to trick Helen into accusing him."

The judge smiled dubiously. "How did you know?"

"I had seen one of the waiters give Cynthia a note while she was talking with Dave. Shortly after, she left to go to her cabin. When I found her dead, I looked for the note. It was missing. I knew then that the note was her reason for going to the cabin. Two people knew that I had looked for the note. Phil Orcutt and his wife. They were in the cabin at the time. They realized that I had seen the waiter give the note to Cynthia. The waiter had to be silenced. It wasn't a job for a woman. Orcutt did it."

Judge Thomas nodded sagely. "You are still a good chess player, Ken."

I shook my head. "Old John Wales was the chess player. He controlled all the moves, from the moment of his death."

THE END.

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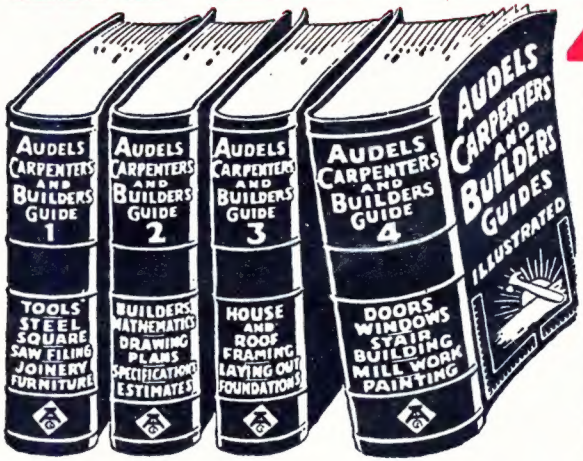

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